

SIREN

VOL 11 NO. 3, 1989

\$8.00

**BIRTHING
PAINS
AT
VJH**

*"When I feel the baby
head coming, I decide
mi mind: if is death,
is just death.
So I push, and
the baby born...and
lay down
same place."*

PLUS

YES, JAMAICAN MEN CAN
BE LOVING PARENTS!
DATA ENTRY INDUSTRY:
A WOMAN'S WORLD?
SENATOR BILLIE MILLER ON
WOMEN, DEVELOPMENT,
AND MORE...
FUN TECHNIQUES
FOR GROUP
BUILDING,
SHARING &
LEARNING...

Mbala

SISTREN OUT DEH!

Buss Out! Island Tour

Dates still available for **Sistren's 1990 Island Tour** (January to June). Community groups and schools wishing to host a performance of **Buss Out!** should contact **Joy or Annie at 20 Kensington Crescent, Kingston 5. Tel: 929-2457 or 929-6171.**

Sexual Violence is the theme being explored by the **Workshop Team** with women in the **St. Peter Claver** community groups, in schools and at the **Woman Inc. Trade Fair, Woman '89**. Group building workshops using drama-in-education techniques have also been conducted with the **Wesley Women's Drama Club**.

Launch: The **Sistren Research** excitement was the launching of its updated booklet, **No To Sexual Violence**.

Audio-Visuals: **Muffet Inna All A Wi** is now available on video-cassette and the **Sistren** film on sugar workers in Jamaica, **Sweet Sugar Rage**, was screened at Canada's first **International Festival of Films and Videos by Women of Colour and Third World Women**, in **Vancouver** in mid-November. We've also been planning a radio programme for 1990 with the **West German** station **Deutsche Welle**. Interviews were conducted with various **Sistren** members for **KLAS** radio station and for a study on **CUSO**.

AT THE MEETING PLACE

Visitors have included a group of **West German** students led by tutor, **Michael Hoenish**; **Bob Randell** of the **US Peace Corps**; representatives of **UNICEF** and **Christian Aid**; **Karen DeSouza** and **Jocelyn Dow** of **Guyana's Red Thread**. We hosted **Professor Ebun Clarke**, Director

of the **Centre for Cultural Studies** at the **University of Lagos, Nigeria**, in collaboration with **Groundwork Theatre Company**, and shared textile printing techniques with **Danuta Radzig** from **Red Thread**.

The **Sister's Celebration Planning Committee** has started organising for its **Annual International Woman's Week Concert**. Want to give support? Contact: **Joan Edwards** at **Sistren** (Tel: 929-6171 / 929-2457) or **Medlyn Phillips** at **Projects for People** (Tel: 929-7356 / 929-2304.)

HONOR GAWN!



1988: Receiving a Silver Musgrave Medal.

Honor Ford-Smith, our founding Artistic Director and a leading force in the collective, has resigned. Following her fellowship at the **Bunting Institute Radcliffe Research and Study Centre, USA**, and work on the **Sistren Research** video production about the lives of early Jamaican feminists, **Amy Bailey** and **Mae Farquarson** (with director **Cynthia Wilmot**), **Honor** is back in **Canada**.

She has a grant from **WAND** to complete the book she started at **Bunting**, and she's very interested in doing more film work.

From 1977 when **Honor** met with a group of working-class women who were interested in drama and asked them, "What do you want to do plays about?", she's been there for **Sistren**; directing and scripting plays, helping to build every area of work, doing research and editing interviews with them about their lives for the book, **Lionheart Gal**. So you know she won't be losing touch. In fact, we who work on **Sistren** magazine already have a promise of articles in the coming year. We'll miss **Honor** a-whole-heap-and-a-little-bit-more for sure, even though we fully understand her need to develop and broaden her skills. All the best, mi love.



Editor	Joan Ross-Frankson
Editorial Team	Annie Blake Beverley Elliott Lana Finikin Lillian Foster Marcia Lewis Hilary Nicholson Mae Thompson-Rose Jerline Todd
Contributors	Corienne Barnes Joan French Hilary Nicholson Leone Ross
Photography	Karen DeSouza Alvin Jones Patrick Smikle
Cover	Mbala
Illustrations	Mbala Hector Cattolica (UNFPA) Women's Tribune Centre
Design/Art	Twenty: O Four
Printing	Gentle Printers
Distribution	Annie Blake Carla Davis Lauren Williams

Sistren is produced three times a year by the **Sistren Theatre Collective** as part of its on-going efforts to highlight issues of concern to women in the society. **Sistren** is a non-profit making collective of women. Other activities include theatre, workshops using the drama-in-education methodology, and research. **Sistren** has also experimented with film, and produced a book of members' life stories, **Lionheart Gal**. **Sistren Textiles** is the group's income earning project. Contact: 20 Kensington Crescent, Kingston 5, Jamaica, West Indies. Tel: (809) 929-2457/929-6171.

ACQUAINTED



Joy Erskine

SISTREN PROFILE

Meet **Joy Erskine**, *Sistren's* most all-round member. Joy joined *Sistren* in 1977 and worked part-time with us until 1983 as secretary, musician (she's a drummer) and office manager. Since then, she's been a full-time member and more recently has become a budding actress. Despite the workload, Joy schedules plenty of time for her two children, 19-year-old **Jacqueline** and five-year-old **Keidre**, and to enjoy her favourite forms of relaxa-

tion - dancing, listening to music, cooking and driving.

She says, "*Sistren* has made me more assertive and confident within myself." For her personal development, she's working to improve her many skills. And, for *Sistren*? "I would like to see the Collective develop a broader outreach programme, and improve internal structures for personal achievement."

PERSONAL NOTES

BORN: A baby boy, **Akeem**, to *Sistren's* **Bev Hanson**. Bev and partner, **Chris Willox**, are beaming with joy! Our best wishes to the family.

CONDOLENCES: To our stage manager, **Annie Blake**, whose sister, **Rose**, died recently.

WELCOME: New *Sistren* staff member, Accountant, **Marcia Lewis**. Marcia has also joined the Editorial Team of *Sistren* magazine.

BUREAU CHANGES: Big changes at the **Bureau of Women's Affairs**. New Executive Director is **Margaret Bernal**. **Pat Sinclair**, her predecessor, is now heading the **N.I.S Division of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Sports**. **Elaine Rainford**, formerly of the **YWCA** is the new Project Officer overseeing implementation of the National Policy Statement on Women. Several other staffers, including **Geneva Murray** and **Dahlia Fuller-Phillips** have left.

NANNY MONUMENT: The Organisation of Women for Progress is lobbying government to erect a statue of **National Heroine, Nanny of the Maroons**, in **National Heroes' Park**, in recognition of the contribution of women to Jamaica's history and development.

OFF TO AFRICA: **Carol Lawes** of **Groundwork Theatre Company**; visiting **Nigeria and Ghana** to build links between **Caribbean and African** popular theatre organisations.

APOLOGIES: To **Paula Stimpson** of **CARIMAC**. We failed to credit her for the item on **Nila Latty** (*My Small Corner*, Vol 11, No. 2). Sorry, Paula.

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POPULATION CONTROL AND WOMEN'S HEALTH

Two Sides of the Development Coin

Mention population control and most people think overpopulation. They move from there to visions of overcrowding, malnourished and dying children, ghettos, poverty, disease and illiteracy.

Because population planners believe population control merely means having fewer children, family planning programmes in countries like our own, tend to focus mainly on the supply of contraceptives to women. In other words the problems will be solved if only we women would stop having children.

The result is that many of us are subjected to inappropriate contraceptive use. In their zeal the planners dole out contraceptives without proper counselling. Many of us suffer side effects and give them up. And so the myths about family planning "drawing us down and burning wi belly-bottom" are given credence.

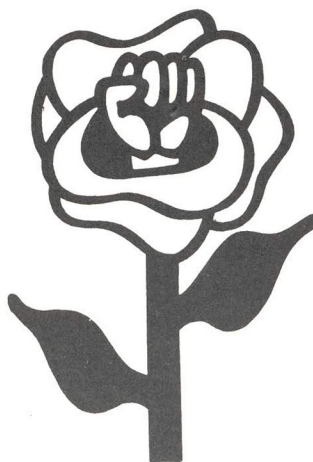
The problem with this approach is that other aspects of women's reproductive health become secondary to the overwhelming desire to keep down the birth rate. The pressure is on us to bear "two instead of too many", regardless of what we as individuals may desire.

Fact is however, that all this hysteria about us "breeding up the place" is far from being true. We Jamaican women are having about half as many children as we did 25 years ago. In 1960 the fertility rate was 5.67 and it fell to 2.75 by 1985. Fertility rates among teenagers (15-19) have also fallen over the years, but not as rapidly as in other age groups. The highest number of births are presently being recorded among women between the ages of 20 and 29.

Fact is too, that society invests comparatively little in women, yet we are central to development for all. It is we who control

most of the non-money economy - the subsistence agriculture, the bearing and raising of children, and the domestic labour. We also play an important role in the money economy - in trading, the 'informal sector' and as wage earners.

We join wholeheartedly with UNFPA Executive Director, Dr Nafis Sadik, in her call to invest in women and make them the focus of the 1990s. It makes good sense. Any change for the better in any aspect of our lives, will be a change for the better generally. We are, after all, 50% of the society and we are playing a vital role even though there are many constraints on our ability to achieve our full potential.



So, while family planning is a good thing, it will have its best effect only when both women and men are prepared to deal with it. And only when all other aspects of women's lives are improved so that we are able to make our choices free of constraints.

Therefore it follows that population control needs to have a reproductive health approach with women at the centre, rather than the narrow emphasis on family planning.

What does a reproductive health approach require? Some suggestions:

- **Reallocation of limited human resources in the health sector.** For example, over 300 community midwives deliver one or two babies a month, but at Victoria Jubilee 65% of the babies are being born at risk with no assistance (see story page 8).

- **Improved medical resources for women.** For example, cancer of the breast and cervix is suffered by 50% of all female cancer victims, yet there is no national screening for breast cancer and no government facility for doing mammograms.

- **Strong and sustained Family Life education** in the school curriculum at the earliest stages to assist both girls and boys to reach a higher level of understanding of their own and each others sexuality.

- **Improvements in the Family Planning Programme** to educate women to once and for all deal with difficulties associated with contraceptive use. For example, use and misuse of various methods (like taking the pill only on those days when sexual activity is anticipated); fears and misconceptions (like the pill causes inflammation of the tubes); actual problems (like excessive bleeding experienced with depo provera).

- **Increased access for rural women** to abortion clinics like Glen Vincent, the Women's Centre Programme for Pregnant Adolescents (which has a less than 2% pregnancy repeat) and crisis centres like the one run by Woman Inc. in Kingston.

- **Improved employment opportunities (quality and quantity) for young women** to allow for a higher level of economic independence which in turn encourages their empowerment and increases awareness of family planning. ♀

MY SMALL

New Vision Teaching



Carol Narcisse is at home in her small corner, offering specialised and individual tuition to young children. Armed with several years of experience teaching and developing programmes for children with learning disabilities, 29 year-old Carol was determined to "do her own thing." The result of that determination? The birth of **New Vision Preparatory School and Educational Services** which opened on Balmoral Road in Kingston, just last September.

Getting the school started was not an easy task. "For women, getting finance to start a new business is the most frustrating thing in the world," Carol said. She got through with the help of her husband, who not only gave her moral support but also assisted in getting a loan, finding accommodation and purchasing materials and equipment.

Carol believes education "must have a broader objective than just passing examinations." That's why class sizes are being kept at 15. As Carol points out, "Beyond that number the teacher cannot offer the individualised attention that is so necessary for developing rounded human beings."

Carol and one other teacher, Nancy Anderson, presently offer Kindergarten to Grade two level classes in the mornings, and extra lessons in the afternoons, in any subject for children from any school.

New Vision also has big plans for the near future including computer studies, classes for adults up to G.C.E. 'O' Level standard, a remedial programme, lessons in theatre and music and a consultancy service for parents of children with learning disabilities. ♀

Action Packed Teens

Teens-In-Action is a group of young women from the low-income area of Seaview Gardens with a mission to highlight the particular problems facing teenage girls. Rape, incest, teenage pregnancy and drug abuse are the issues on which they focus using drama-in-education techniques. Their current production deals with rape and another is planned on the topic of drug abuse. The group was born two years ago in response to the brutal rape of a teenage girl in the community. Despite the major problem of finance (they desperately need a typewriter, tape recorder and travelling funds), the group aims to start a monthly schools programme to rap with other teens, and to hold counselling sessions for parents in their community. ♀



A KIMBO (For Sistren)

*Ah pulling strength
from yu spirit of fire
ghetto mother
Ah taste raw truth
from yu lion heart*

*Yu hol' yu grung
an stamp yu mark
yu tink like yu feel
An talk like yu walk
yu tek di bangarang
An yu live out a song*

*Di broom bruck
and di room fall open
Look how yu a bus out
Wid a song
an a Kimbo.....*

*Yu Kimbo and grow
instead of Limbo dung low
yu live out di play
An play out di life
yu carve out a beat
Wid di bitter an sweet*

*Trial walk back a yu
ah something good yu a do*

*Di barrier melt
de Horizon wider
but muffed yu smile
an bos weh di spider
an trample di doubts
and step pon di fire.....*

*Facing di struggle
Wid a Kimbo*

by Owen 'Blacka' Ellis

CORNER

Conscious

Health

Who would have thought that one woman is responsible for many of the wide variety of natural fruit juices and other vegetarian dishes now displayed on the shelves of health food stores in Kingston.

Enid Budhal is the founder of the Jamaican Vegetarian Society. She stopped eating red meat and dairy products in 1972 and began experimenting with natural food dishes. Soon her fame grew, as the health conscious came from far and wide to sample her inventions, and

health food stores began making bulk orders. Working from her little kitchen at home, Enid did more than just sell her products. Advice was also offered to customers on the preparation of dishes, proper nutrition and backyard gardening.

Enid has now outgrown her little corner. She has started selling her products on Saturday mornings at **International Yard**, on Waterloo Avenue and she hopes to stabilise this activity by January with help from other vegetarians. And, her vision for the future doesn't stop there. "Right now my greatest desire is to see a Soya plant set up in every parish in Jamaica. All Jamaicans should be aware of the nutritional values of soya and how easily it can be grown."

Blue Print for Success



Michelle McCreath is one Jamaican woman who is on her way to the top and there is no stopping her. At 27, she is Managing Director of one of the larger printers in the island - Mapco Business Printers Limited. Mapco started from humble beginnings four years ago, in a small back room with a staff of six and one printing press. The company now employs 35 workers in more spacious accommodation on Retirement Road.

For Michelle, going into business came about purely by chance. "At school I did

Chemistry, Physics, Biology and Mathematics because I had made up my mind that I wanted to be a doctor." But when her father, a businessman, became ill, Michelle took a year off university to help. It was then she decided business was definitely her line.

Michelle has experienced crude remarks from men who seem to resent a woman in her position. And the work is very demanding. Most days she's on the job from 8 a.m. to 9 or 10 at nights. But none of this bothers her. "It's a challenge I find very fulfilling," she says.

And Michelle has a word for women who are thinking of going into business. "Go for it. Set your standards high and reach for the stars!" ♀

CELEBRATING AT HOME (AT LAST!)

It was a collective house opening when members of the St Peter Claver Women's Housing Co-operative threw a party to celebrate moving into their own homes. Several of the women used to live in tenement yards. Others had faced high rentals or were forced to move out of the Waltham Park community where they had their roots. Now they are back in their community, in comfortable surroundings, and paying a monthly housing charge towards maintenance and water bills. Their tenacity and patience in raising \$2 million to purchase and renovate spacious, older-type houses, has started to pay off. The project aims to eventually house all 45 co-op members. This first success has given homes to six members and their families (pictured right), increased the optimism of other members, and given great pride to those who have supported their efforts. The Housing Co-operative grew out of the St Peter Claver Free Trade Zone Women's Group. ♀



Birthing Pains

by Joan Ross-Frankson

"It's very rough here. Is you alone have to be in the labour ward. You be calling, 'Nurse', and no nurse, just you alone. Is only God help mi. When I feel like the baby head was coming, I decide mi mind; if is death, is just death. So I push, and the baby born. Then me never know wha' fi do and di baby lay down same place. One long time after, the nurse come and cut the navel string..."

For 19-year-old Carlene, having her first child alone, at the Victoria Jubilee Hospital made her feel "down". She is still in profound shock when I talk with her a-day-and-a-half later. She had known little or nothing about the process of childbirth before she went into labour. After the experience, she only knows that the pain was "hot". Her brand new baby, a six-pound boy, whimpers slightly. She regards him with eyes that are flat and without lustre. Carlene knows no joy in this moment.

But listen to the truly horrifying part of the story. At Victoria Jubilee, Jamaica's only specialist obstetrics hospital which is responsible for a quarter of all births in the island, Carlene's experience is far from being unique.

MAJORITY OF BIRTHS UNATTENDED

At present 40 or so babies are being born each day at VJH. Estimates vary as to how many are being born unattended. Matron Roselyn Flash, who heads the VJH nursing body says it's about 50%. Other health sources I checked say it is often as high as 65%.

But data compiled for the Ministry of Health (A Profile of Maternal and Child Health and Family Planning in Jamaica, 1987) does not show these figures. That data says 87% of all babies born in Jamaica are delivered by trained health personnel. The problem with the data is that it assumes all hospital births are attended. However, it should be quite clear to all involved that

such an assumption is now highly questionable given the exodus from the medical professions, especially among nurses, in recent years.

CHRONIC NURSE SHORTAGE

The shortage of nursing staff at Victoria Jubilee is chronic. VJH should have a nursing cadre of 167. It now supports only 88 nursing staff (excluding the Matrons). There should be 70 Registered Nurse-Midwives (three years general training and one year midwifery training). There are only 20. The number of Midwives (two years training) has dropped to 49 from 67 and where there should be 24 Ward Sisters, there are only 19.

The result? Observation and supervision of the mothers during labour is insufficient.

MOTHERS AND BABIES AT RISK

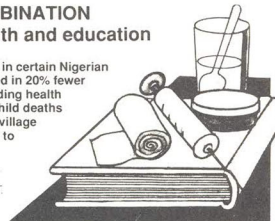
Apart from the mental trauma women suffer when they have to go through the birthing process by themselves, they and their babies are at great physical risk. For the mother there is the risk of haemorrhaging (excessive bleeding), for the baby, brain damage. In the case of the mother, the haemorrhaging may not happen while she is in care, but after she reaches home. Nonetheless, it is directly related to inattention to her uterus immediately after the baby is born.

Lessons in life

A woman's education is the single most important factor in determining how many children she bears and whether they survive.

CRUCIAL COMBINATION ... health and education

- Educating mothers in certain Nigerian villages has resulted in 20% fewer child deaths. Providing health facilities reduced child deaths by 33%. But when village women had access to both health and education child death rates plunged by 87%.



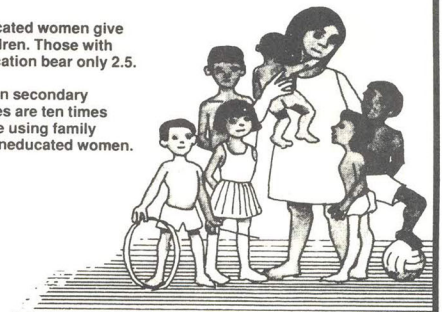
CHILDREN ... of educated women live longer

- Four to six years of mothers' schooling reduces deaths of children in their first 12 months by as much as 20%. Every additional year of education causes a drop of up to 9% in deaths of children up to the age of six.
- A 1% rise in women's literacy is three times more effective in reducing child mortality than a 1% rise in the number of doctors.



EDUCATED WOMEN ... have fewer children

- In Brazil uneducated women give birth to 6.5 children. Those with secondary education bear only 2.5.
- In Liberia women secondary school graduates are ten times more likely to be using family planning than uneducated women.



at Victoria Jubilee

Dr Heather White, VJH's Resident Consultant Pediatrician, says lack of adequate supervision during labour causes the major problems.

"Women are being robbed of the possibility of intervention which would cut down risks to their unborn child and to themselves," she observed.

Proper supervision means constant monitoring of the unborn baby's heartbeat for any irregularity, any signal, which requires that the baby be born immediately. At that point, intervention by caesarean section or forceps could be prescribed. When the baby's heart is not constantly monitored, asphyxia, a general term which describes the interruption of oxygen to the baby's brain, may result.

There is also another risk to the baby which is born without assistance. During the birthing process, the uterus is pushing out the baby head first with tremendous force. The head is positioned face down with the chin against the baby's chest. Because of the force with which the head emerges, assistance is needed to prevent it snapping backwards suddenly, which can cause vascular bleeding (bleeding inside the head).

ASPHYXIA A COMMON PROBLEM

Remarkably, VJH has very few cases of vascular bleeding, despite the large number of babies being born there without help. Asphyxia is by far the more common problem, leading to neo-natal seizures (fits in the newborn) with the possibility of brain

damage. Detection of vascular bleeding is not always possible, due to the lack of an ultra-sound scanner, which would allow the Pediatrician to see exactly what is happening inside the baby's head.

Dr White said, "If there is a clinical abnormality, then we can pick up the problem. If there are no signs in the first week, we can't identify the problem, but that baby could have suffered damage which may result in learning deficiencies, subtle mental retardation or anti-social behaviour later on in life. The degree would depend on the child's mix of genes and his/her growing environment."

HIGH MORTALITY RATES

Jamaica's high maternal and infant mortality rates bring the issues into focus even more sharply. "We lose a fair number of babies at VJH," says Dr White. "This is very demoralising for us all. It's a big part of the frustration among staff members."

Our babies die at the rate of 27 out of every one thousand live births islandwide, according to a recent Ministry of Health survey. This compares with about five deaths per thousand live births in the U.K. Our mothers are dying at the rate of 11.5 per 10,000 live births, compared with one or two per 10,000 in the industrialised countries. The main causes of death are hypertension (high blood pressure during pregnancy), haemorrhaging and infection.

AVOIDABLE FACTORS

But there's another side to the story. An examination by the Ministry of Health of all maternal deaths between 1981 and 1983, found that one or more 'avoidable factors' were present in 68% of cases. Avoidable factors included inadequacies in the health system but also women's own lack of motivation in seeking adequate ante-natal care.

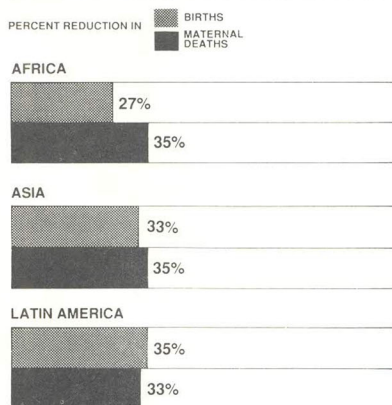
Sister Lillian Baker who is in charge of the VJH ante-natal clinic says, "Our expectant mothers need to attend a doctor or a clinic as soon as they suspect they are pregnant but many don't. They come at the last min-

Family planning saves lives

The lives of 5.6 million children and 200,000 women could be saved each year if all the women who wanted to limit their families had access to family planning.

THE OPPORTUNITY

If women who wanted no more children had the choice there would be a 38% reduction in births and a 29% drop in maternal deaths worldwide



THE DANGER

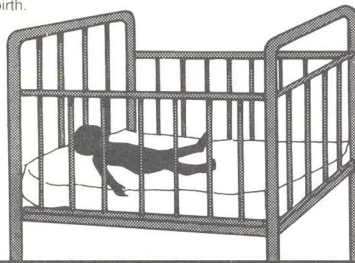
Unwanted pregnancies are dangerous – both for mothers and children.

MOTHERS

500,000 women die of maternal causes a year. More than 200,000 of these could be saved if they were able to plan their families.

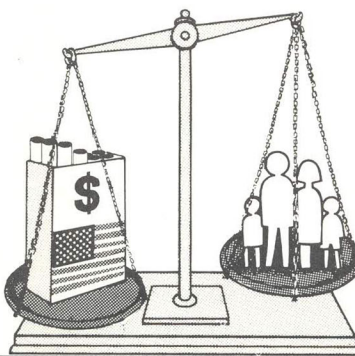
CHILDREN

10 million children under the age of five die a year – more than half of these as a result of poor maternal health during pregnancy, unsafe delivery or inadequate care after birth.



THE COST

To bring family planning to all women who want it would cost an extra \$2 billion a year until the year 2000. This is less than the annual US expenditure on tobacco advertising.



ute. We take the specimen of blood and it comes back to us after they have delivered. We have not been able to ascertain whether they are healthy enough to have a baby, or to monitor the development of the baby."

Official figures back up Sister Baker's experience. Only 20% of Jamaican mothers attend a clinic in the first three months of pregnancy and 10% don't go until after six months. The majority, 70%, visit clinics sometime during the second three months of pregnancy, but a sizable proportion of those do not return or maintain regular enough visits, during or after pregnancy.

Part of the problem is society's ambivalence towards Family Life education. Neither at home nor at school are we being given a full understanding about the complexity of our bodies in preparation for the task of birthing future generations. Conditions at many ante-natal clinics are hardly encouraging either.

CROWDED CLINIC

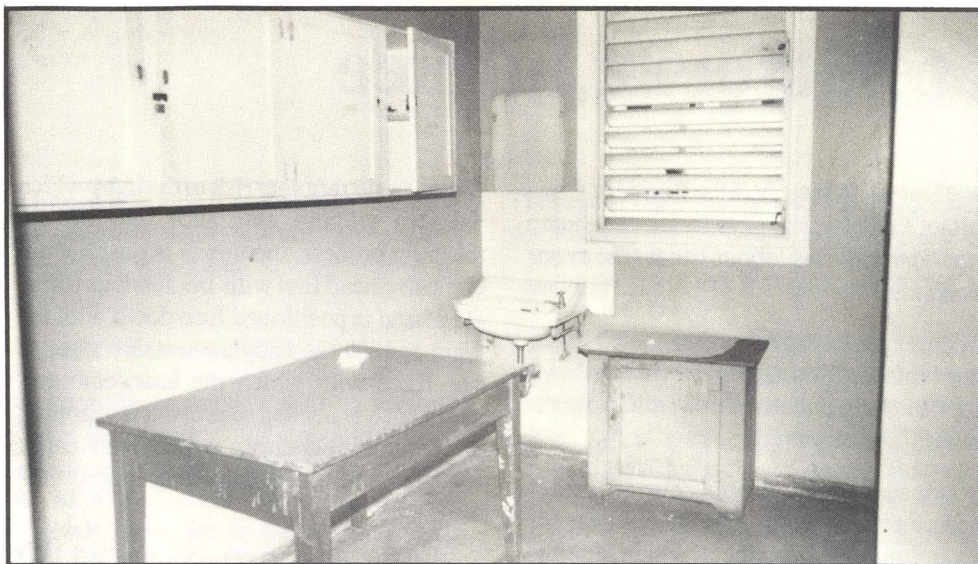
A wide cross-section of women attend the ante-natal clinic at VJH in preparation to have their babies at the hospital. In any given day, the clinic is crowded with an average of 45 mothers-to-be. They start queueing from as early as 4 o'clock in the morning. 18-year-old Marcia, a clerical assistant, said she arrived at 5.30 and was fifteenth in line.

By 11.30 that morning when I spoke to Marcia, with her seven month belly weighing down her swollen ankles, she was fed-up. Breakfast, a dry bun and cheese purchased from a vendor on the compound, had long since been digested. Baby was kicking for more food and "the wood bench (was) getting uncomfortable."

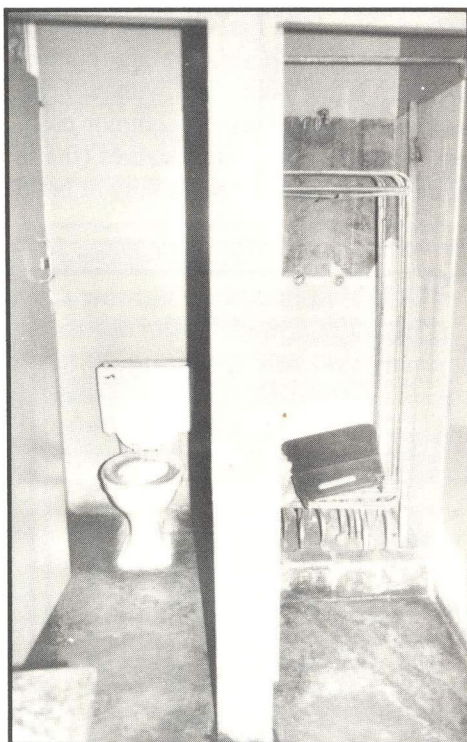
LACK OF PLANNING AND REGRETS

I spoke to 18 women at random over two days as they waited for attention at the clinic. Only one of them had planned for the baby her body was nourishing, and one other said she had become pregnant while on the pill. Their comments were instructive and often poignant.

Elaine, a 37-year-old street vendor expecting her eighth child said, "I didn't plan to have (them) but I get them so I bring them. My husband was in country when I



Deplorable rest room facilities for nurses on Ward 5.



had the seventh. I did plan to have the tie-off (tubal ligation) but he never reach in time to sign the paper." Yes, believe it or not, if a woman is married she **does** need written permission from her husband, although I understand discretion is often practised.

28-year-old, unemployed domestic, Gwendolyn, was due to deliver her first in a few weeks. She had not used contraception and does not believe in abortion. But she also regrets being pregnant. "For the whole time, I've been sorry that it happened. The father talks like he is glad but he doesn't give me emotional or financial support. It makes me very depressed."

In far too many cases, those questioned were having their babies because of the influence of people around them. This one's man wanted a youth, that one's mother believed abortion was a sin; this one's friend said family planning "draw you down and mek you belly-bottom burn" or that one's neighbours whispered "mule" in her ear. The sad fact was that too many of them were having children to please others and not because they themselves wanted to be mothers.

MOTHERS UNPREPARED FOR DELIVERY

The staff and space shortage at the clinic has impacted badly on the preparation of the mothers-to-be for their delivery. It's not possible for the overburdened staff to facilitate those fathers who would wish to be present to give their baby-mothers emotional support. In any case, says Sister Baker, "Not many fathers are interested in learning about the birth process." Not enough mothercraft classes are held and the exercise classes have had to be suspended.

NEGATIVE NURTURING

Of course by the time the baby is born, the vast majority of the mothers have accepted their new role. The impact of a traumatic birth - the pain, the fear, the lack of emotional support and early bonding with the child - may well hold negative conse-

quences for the quality of their nurturing. But, they have decided to accept this new responsibility.

For others though, the situation is too desperate to bear; escape is the only answer.

ABANDONED BABIES

Three-month-old Marlon was one of the three abandoned babies in care of the nurses and Ward Assistants on the fourth floor when I visited. All three of them were beautiful, healthy and bright-eyed. The fact that they could smile and respond to coaxing was a testimony to the special care they receive.

Despite the burdens already on the staff, they were giving genuine love to these little ones beyond the call of duty, including "begging" clothing in their communities. Their caring attitude was reflected in small but powerful ways. Poor Marlon, they said with regret, would have to wear a pink dress when he attended the Family Court hearing that would decide his future.

Nothing else was available in the depleted wardrobe. Could Marlon's real mother have cared more?

Newborn babies are abandoned by their mothers quite often at VJH. Marlon's teenage mother had him early one afternoon and by 6 o'clock that evening, she had disappeared. For this young woman, who can hardly have begun to know herself, growing Marlon was a task she simply could not cope with.

TRAUMATIC

Matron Flash and Matron Isolyn Hines have been working in their chosen profession at the Victoria Jubilee Hospital for almost 60-years between them. Matron Flash says (and you can see the pain on her face as she speaks), "I've been here so long, but this is really the worst I have seen conditions. It is demoralising when you know the type of care that should be given, especially to the young ones having their first babies. It is traumatic for them and

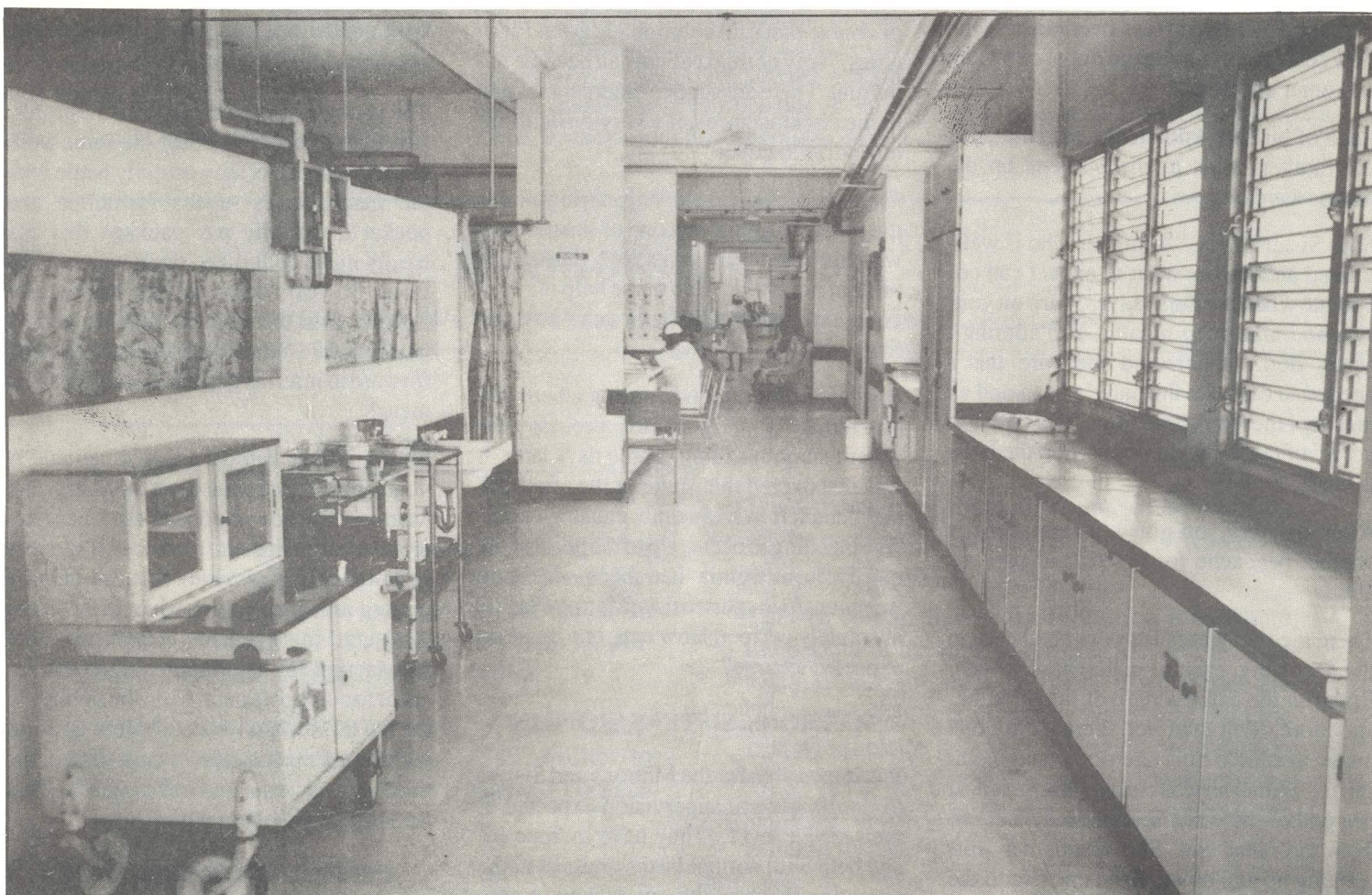
traumatic for us."

The desperate staff shortage at the institution means that no amount of juggling from one area to the next can alleviate the situation. On the labour ward, there's a Sister and two or three midwives or one Registered Nurse midwife on duty during each shift. At any given time, six or seven mothers may all be about to deliver. And, you don't need to be 'the maths brain from primary school' to work out what that means!

NEW WING ADDS TO PROBLEMS

Ironically, the new wing of the hospital, opened in 1980, has added to the problem rather than helped. (It almost goes without saying that no one asked the nursing staff to make an input to the design of the patient-care sections.)

Sister Hines points out, "The previous labour ward layout meant that if I was with one mother waiting for the baby's head to



Hard work walking the length of wards in the new block.



Matrons Flash (seated) and Hines. Sixty years at Jubilee between them

push out, I could also monitor the progress of several others, and rush over to assist, but now I can't see; I have to go out of one room and enter another."

Lack of birthing knowledge on the part of the mothers adds to the burdens on the labour ward.

Says Sister Hines, "A mother who is well-trained and knows what to expect can co-operate when the nurse says, 'Turn on your side and take deep breaths. I'm coming'. Many don't understand the care that's needed to ease out the baby's head and as they feel the first contraction, they want to get rid of the baby. So floops, and the baby is out."

After delivery, on-going patient care is another headache for nurses and patients alike.

There are two wards for post-natal care in the new wing, each of which has 56 beds. Both run the entire length of the building, and more often than not, there's only one nurse available for afternoon and night shifts. "If that nurse is caring for a patient at one end of the ward, another may call out from the other end. She spends her shift walking up and down, from one end to the other," Matron Flash says with understandable feeling.

'Abnormal' patients are kept at one end but of course that's no solution. Matron Flash notes, "Any normal patient can become abnormal. There are sudden emergencies and in the circumstances, it's very difficult for one nurse to cope."

The case of 26 year old Virginia highlights the point. Virginia was one of the mothers who received full assistance during the birth of her child. "The nurse help me well good, through she did know seh it was my first baby."

But despite the attention during labour and the birth, for Virginia the process still wasn't smooth sailing. Three days later, it was discovered that some of the afterbirth had been left in her womb, causing excessive bleeding to occur. Up to the point of the discovery, Virginia had been receiving treatment for hypertension. Matron Flash is absolutely correct. How can one nurse be expected to cope?

MATRONS, SISTERS 'ROPE IN'

It is impossible for the Matrons and Sisters to do the general supervision expected at their senior level. They have to 'rope in' and help with normal births or assist in the operating theatre with emergency or caesarian cases. "If I am on my rounds of the

wards and I see that a baby is about to be born unattended, obviously, I have to stop and help," says Matron Flash.

The younger nurses coming into the profession see their seniors doing the same work as themselves. As they do daily battle with the inadequacies of the institution and pocket a monthly pay package that can hardly make ends meet, their vision of the future 30 years down the line has become warped. Can there be any point in getting promotion? What do they have to look forward to in terms of professional achievement?

Matron Hines bemoans this situation. "A young nurse used to emulate the Sisters and Matrons. But now she doesn't see the Sister or the Matron in their full role. All she sees is an extra pair of hands that can help by getting a bedpan for a patient if the Ward Assistant is not available. Now there is little satisfaction for us or appreciation and respect for the profession from the public. In the old days when we stood in our uniform waiting on the bus, if two cars passed, the third would stop and offer a lift. That doesn't happen these days."

CONSOLIDATE RESOURCES

So can anything be done about these awful

conditions at VJH given the nation's sick economy?

Immediate action can be taken to ease the shortage of trained personnel by consolidating resources. The system supports 325 community midwives. These professionals are badly under-utilised, performing only one or two deliveries each month! The obvious answer is to place the community midwives in the hospitals, at least for part of their time. That way, some of the pressure on mothers, babies and nurses at VJH could be eased.

SPECIAL INCENTIVES

Matron Hines emphasises the need for nurses to receive special incentives. "There are nurses at home. We need to attract them back into the profession."

None of the nurses I spoke to stressed wage increases, although obviously all of them want salaries that can keep up with the constantly escalating cost of living. Sister Cordelia Nevers' attitude was fairly typical. "It's not the money so much as the pressure. Some of us explode from time to time because of the pressure. Not everybody can take the situation calmly. We are only human after all."

After 27 years in the profession, and fre-

quently working double shifts (from 7am-10pm), Sister Nevers gets about \$1,700.00 in her hand each month. That's after allowances are added to her basic pay of \$1,869.00 and the whole lot taxed.

TAX FREE ALLOWANCES

One incentive could be tax-free allowances that are also more readily available. Take the \$16.00 supper and transport allowance. It's difficult to imagine supper only costing \$8.00 in this day and age, and you can't get a taxi between any two points for \$8.00 anymore. But apart from that, the nurses have to apply for the allowance **after** it has come out of their own pockets, and when they get it back with their salary, it has been taxed.

Would it really be so impossible for the Ministry to purchase a bus and hire a driver for the hardpressed nurses of VJH? I think not, given the fact that money has been found by the government to import high prices cars for ministers, who all own their own cars anyway!

Then there's the vexed question of sessional fees (for doing extra shifts). The nurses only get about \$160.00 per session (about \$20.00 an hour) but this is fully taxed, so they actually get about \$120.00.

They have fought and won a battle to get the sessional fees paid mid-month, but the tax remains.

If foreigners setting up business in the Free Trade Zones can get tax incentives, why can't our nurses, especially since they're being asked to tighten belts on a skeleton frame!

The question that begs an answer is, where are governments' priorities? And, indeed what are the priorities of all of us as citizens of the Jamaican Society?

The right of women and their babies to the best possible care and attention during the birthing process is not merely woman's business. It is very much the business of the nation. As Matron Flash puts it, "We can't allow our mothers to continue to deliver unattended. We will have idiot adults down the line!"

Can we afford the birthing pains at Victoria Jubilee? The simple answer must be a very loud No! ♀

*(*The names of the patients interviewed have been changed by the author.)*

Economic Crisis?

(Or, Why We Don't Have Enough Money For Social Services)

by Joan French

The poor countries are paying back to the rich countries in profits and loan repayments more than they are getting in new loans and investments. In 1988-89 we paid out \$50 billion more than we got. For 1986-89 the figure was \$120 billion.

In 1987 Jamaica borrowed a total of US\$312 million in new loans, but paid out US\$437 million to repay loans. In other words, we paid out US\$125 million more than we got.

The exports from the poor countries are increasing far more in volume than in value. We produce more, but we are paid less.

Then of course there is the migration link, where the people of the poor countries are forced to go to the rich countries to get jobs. Even if they are the worst jobs there, they are better paid than the best available to us home. The rich countries do not even have to pay the transportation of training costs for this labour. Here again, the poor pay, the rich get things free.

Yes, Jamaican Men Can Be Loving Parents!

“Being macho doesn’t mean that a man cannot be loving. In fact caring for and nurturing a child requires a great deal of strength and responsibility..” Male member of staff, University Hospital.

Mesana DeSouza, a nurse, midwife, family planning counsellor, family life educator and single parent, was convinced that the Jamaican male is capable of loving and nurturing his children, despite society’s accepted image of him as an irresponsible ‘scattershot’. “My experience is that more men are taking an interest in their children’s development, but not enough is being done to promote parenting from a male perspective.”

EXPLORATORY STUDY

Desouza’s interest in the topic led to a research paper on the nurturing features of the Jamaican male parent. It is based on a study of 100 male members of staff at the University Hospital, excluding medical doctors.

They were drawn from Maintenance, Security, Services (porters, technicians, stores), Administration, Physiotherapy, Radiography and Pharmacy. Their ages ranged from 18-45 years and education, from primary to tertiary. Their children’s ages ranged from newborn to 18 years - and 2/3 of them were present during the birth process, or nearby pacing the floor!

POSITIVE IMAGES

Some of these men expressed great concern about society’s negative assumptions of the male parent. The impact of those assumptions inhibited to varying degrees, their nurturing instinct. When a father has his daughter on his lap, do observers suspect he may be finding sexual gratification? If a father is openly warm and affectionate with his boy-child, will that encourage homosexuality?

These questions should not be surprising. Incest and child abuse are on the increase and in the news, and there is near hysteria from some sections of the media about a

perceived “growth” of homosexuality. The “Maama Man” or “sof’ man” image also opens them to ridicule and embarrassment. They gain strength from positive media images of male parenting shown in such popular TV programmes as *The Cosby Show* and *Family Ties*. There is pride (and awe) in their own recognition of their nurturing abilities as recorded in DeSouza’s paper.

“Parenting is one of the few places (a man) can learn and experience how to care for another person. It is a humanising experience.”

“I believe that I am letting my kids see that a man can be tender, sensitive, warm and attentive to feelings - just being there for them!”

“It has been so important for me to discover that I can love someone deeply.”

ROLE MODELS

Family life professionals worldwide agree pre-school males need responsible role models. Men who have grown in families where parenting is shared, develop more stable identities and are, in turn, more able

fathers and Paternity Leave to realistically allow them the opportunity for nurturing.

FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION

DeSouza also promotes the introduction of participatory Family Life Education sessions into schools from first grade, to challenge traditional images of mother-only nurturing and myths about males being biologically incapable of loving their children.

Indeed these myths are already being challenged. Parenting roles have had to change to keep up with certain realities of the last 20 or so years. Women’s perceptions about their maternal and domestic roles have changed with their increased entry into paid employment and with improved job opportunities (however limited these factors may be). There’s also been an increase in single-parent families, especially marginal male-headed families. Other significant factors have been the impact from the spread of unemployment, particularly among males, and a tendency towards smaller families with the increased availability and awareness of family-planning methods.



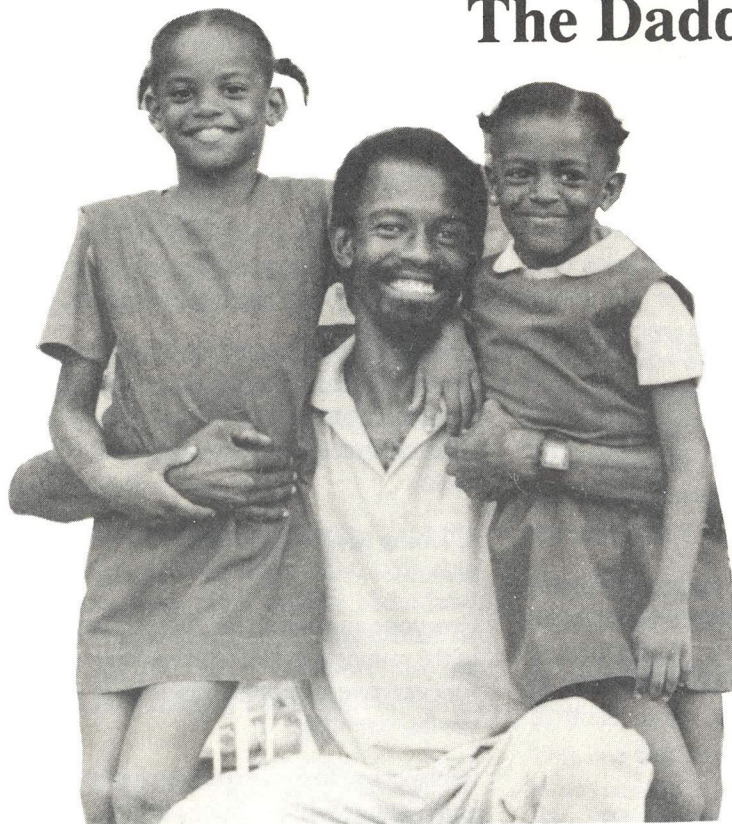
to extend love to their children.

DeSouza recommends support and encouragement for male parents who exhibit nurturing characteristics, in the form of more positive media images, family counselling and reinforcement by health and social professionals working in the field.

Another form of encouragement is legal reform aimed at giving male parents positive recognition. Two suggestions from DeSouza: flexible working schedules for

DeSouza’s views have been further reinforced by aspects of her work at the Hanover Street clinic in downtown Kingston. “I see more and more male parents coming into the clinic with their children, showing concern about how the child is developing physically and mentally; wanting to know what more they can do to assist. These working-class men are taking the initiative. It’s up to society in general and we as women in particular to encourage this positive trend.” ♀

The Daddies that Do



A CHALLENGE REQUIRING COURAGE

Graphic artist, Paul Aitken, has a simple philosophy that strengthens him in the patient parenting he has always willingly subscribed to in helping to grow nine-year-old Toni-Anne and seven-year-old Ebony. "The principle of fatherhood should rest in one's recognition of God as the exemplary Father. Being a father is a challenge that requires courage to succeed, therefore where we identify failures, we must strive for courage to convert them to successes." And, Paul never tires of striving for courage when it comes to Toni-Anne and Ebony!



Ivan Muir is the father of three boys, Michael, Milton and Ian, whose ages range from 13 to 26. With so many years of child rearing behind him, Ivan recalls his close relationship with his first son. "I shared in the care and development of my first son almost equally with his mother - at least for the times when I was home from work. I

Practising the Traditions

Sales Rep, Lee Hall, thanks his own upbringing for the fact that he has so naturally taken up the responsibility of fathering his two-year-old daughter, Debbie-Lee. "Both my wife and myself are from solid families and we are simply practising what we were taught. I've always thought of fatherhood as a great responsibility and having been given the gift of a girl, I feel I am even more attentive."

Lee says no-one has never called him a 'Maama-Man' but that it would not matter if they did. "I don't know why so many men ignore their children but from my point of view, they're lacking in responsibility and probably inattentive to other aspects of life as well."

Lee has been involved with his child from she was in her

mother's womb. "I was always cautious with her mother (during pregnancy), making sure she got a lot of rest and didn't overburden herself with housework. I have involved myself in every aspect of Debbie-Lee's life; changing her nappies, playing with her a lot, making sure she doesn't cry out. You could say, I am at her beck and call. And, I look forward to getting even closer to her, making sure she gets love and care and is never in want."



A GREAT TEAM

remember when Michael was just ten months old I could not let him see me leave for work or he would spend most of the day crying."

"This close relationship with my first son continued all the way through infancy. As he grew up he would direct most of his probing questions to me whether or not his mother was around and I was always the one he would ask to help him with his homework. All through those difficult teenage years we developed a close bond and shared an open relationship. The relationship between us also obtained for my other two sons."

Ivan and his wife are both government workers, so money was always tight but, he says with pride, "We have tried our best to give them the necessary things in life - food, clothing, toys, schooling, friendship and love."

On the question of discipline, Ivan says, "Rules and regulations were laid down and discipline maintained, but all chastisement was done in love. And as my boys grew older I would sit each of them down and discuss their problems with them on a one to one basis and it has worked. I have no regrets. My sons and I are a great team."

Sharing and Learning Together

Popular education begins with people's own life experience. There is no 'expert'. The experience of every woman is valid. The opinion of every woman is valuable.

Women have always shared their experiences. Men have called this sharing process 'gossiping'. But for us, the sharing of our experiences has helped us to gain strength to overcome the hurdles of life. How many times have you gone to a friend with a problem and that friend says, "Mi dear, one time mi did have that problem to. But I overcome by....." And, so we learn from each other. So we begin to understand how much we have in common, beyond differences of class, race or religion; we begin to understand how many of our experiences are shaped by the world we live in. For women, the personal is indeed the political.

More and more women's groups are using participatory forms in order to explore self and situation. Popular theatre groups such

as Sistren and Groundwork Theatre Company can help groups to start the process of exploration for group building and leadership training or to examine a particular issue. The following exercises are fairly typical of those used by such groups to help women and men become actively involved in exploring issues of importance to them. Using such exercises is particularly helpful for promoting dialogue on 'sensitive' matters and for encouraging confidence among shy women.

All these exercises are a starting point which get group members involved in issues of importance to them. Adapt them to suit the needs of the group. Use them to share and learn together. Use them to explore self.

WARMING UP AND BUILDING TRUST

These exercises help people feel comfortable with one another, and build trust, group energy and spirit.

1. Touching (5 minutes)

Each individual is asked to touch specific parts of the bodies of other participants e.g. five pairs of knees, or four backs, or two foreheads. At the same time as they are touching, they must also protect themselves from being touched.

2. Feel the Energy (5 minutes)

Divide the group into pairs. Standing at arms length, face partner, touch palms and close eyes. Feel the energy in you palms. Keeping eyes closed, both partners drop hands and turn around three times. With eyes still closed, try to touch palms again by feeling for the body energy of your partner.

3. Introductions (1/2 hour, depending on group size)

Divide into pairs. Chose a partner you don't already know. Take 5 minutes to ask your partner the following:

What is your name?

Tell me something about yourself which you would like to share.

Why are you here today?

What concerns you most about (the issue being explored)?

Back in the large group, each person introduces her partner to the rest of the group, using the answers she has been given.

it is a good idea for the facilitator to write the main ideas on a flip chart. This helps participants to feel fully involved, and focuses the group on their concerns. Feedback.

4. Doing the Rounds (allow 2 minutes per person)

Everyone sits in a circle. State the purpose of the round: e.g. "let's take a few minutes for everyone to express how they felt about the last exercise".

Each person in turn expresses her thoughts and feelings without interruption.

All the other group members listen while each person speaks. Feedback.

This exercise is endlessly adaptable. It can be used to introduce people; ask why they are involved; express ideas on a particular topic; get feedback on a workshop, video or exercise; get to know each other and build trust; or for 'checking-in' and 'checking-out' at the beginning and end of a get together.

EXPLORING A THEME

1. Brainstorming (5-10 minutes)

This very adaptable exercise can be used to explore a wide variety of issues e.g. feelings of power/powerlessness, anger, self-confidence and fear; reactions to situations/experiences such as abortion, giving birth, having an internal examination, talking with your doctor about sensitive issues, etc.

Form small groups of 4-8 participants and focus on a theme. One person writes down words/ideas on a flip chart as the group calls them out.

Everyone should participate. There should be no interruptions, explanations or judgments. Encourage free-flow and fast expression of ideas.

GETTING MATERIALS TOGETHER



A flip chart and markers are used to take notes in a way that ensures everyone can keep up with the points being made. It's like going back to school and sitting in front of a blackboard. The difference is that the group can keep the notes intact for future use or reference. Use sheets of newsprint for the flip chart; they are cheap and easy to dispose of. Order from any major stationery outlet along with big markers or crayons. Masking tape is the best way of securing sheets of paper to walls, as it peels off fairly easily (if you are careful) without causing damage to paint. Keep a box for your materials which should also include old magazines, scissors, thumb tacks and glue.

The facilitator summarises what has been expressed using the flip chart.

The group explores the summary further.

This exercise can provide a basis for further discussion on the chosen theme. It can also be used with other exercises to explore a theme more deeply.

2. Drawing the Feeling (1/2 hour or more depending on group size.)

Give each person a blank piece of paper. Each person should think about someone or some situation that brings up strong emotions. Concentrate on these emotions for a few minutes.

Take 10-15 minutes to draw or scribble something on your paper that expresses those emotions. Don't worry about how beautiful your drawing is. Just draw or write what you feel. (Variation: use the hand, left or right, that you don't normally use).

Tape the drawings to a wall. Ask participants whether they want to discuss their drawings.

(Variation: discuss drawings in pairs or

have the group say what the drawing means before it is explained by the artist).

3. A Wall of Graffiti (minimum 30 minutes)

Tape large sheets of paper to the wall. Have large markers/crayons available.

Participants stand about 7 feet from the wall with their backs towards the sheets of paper.

Think about the theme for a few moments then go to the sheets of paper and write a comment or draw a picture about the theme, using the crayons provided.

When everyone has finished, examine and discuss the graffiti wall. Feedback.

Keep the graphics created and use in newsletters or on buttons, T-shirts etc.

4. Create a Sculpture (minimum 30 minutes)

This is a fun way to explore complicated issues and situations in a quick and visual way. You will need a large space.

Start with a warm-up exercise to loosen-up and increase creativity.

Chose a theme but don't discuss it.

One person is the sculptor and the others are the clay.

The sculptor places participants in positions in relation to each other. She moves their faces to convey what she wants to express. While she models she cannot speak. She may use as many people as she wishes.

When the sculptor has finished she may chose to explain what her sculpture means.

Other participants observe and think about what the sculpture means. (Variation: non-clay participants add to or change the original sculpture to represent a collective view of the theme).

Group discussion of what the sculpture means focussing on the facts and issues presented, exploring how the issues affect our lives, and analysing how things can be changed. Feedback.

(Source: Sistren drama-in-education methodology; Women's Health Interaction popular education guide, *In Fertile Ground*.)



Sistren members warming up at the start of their annual review of work and group relations.

Data Entry Demands

by Corienne Barnes

Karen Nelson is 21 years old. She speaks with an air of confidence and smiles easily. She is neatly dressed and her make-up has been moderately applied. A graduate of the Montego Bay High School, she finds her job as a data entry operator very demanding and quite often boring.

Diana Lothian is 26 years old. She works in the Data Entry industry in a supervisory capacity. Unlike Karen, Diana just "loves to fool around with computers" and has worked in the field for some five years, but with different firms. Her day to day activities include ensuring work has been equally distributed to the 40 women under her supervision and that no one is kept idle or short of work. She answers numerous queries during her 8-hour shift. Sometimes she even carries out minor repairs to computers.

Diana's job as a supervisor gives her the opportunity to explore the interesting world of computers beyond the basics. While acknowledging that her job is "not a piece of cake", Diana has no intention of leaving the industry right now. She is happy with the way things are.

Karen who sometimes gets bored, is by far the more typical example of women employed by data entry firms in Jamaica. Introduced to Jamaica some five years ago, the data entry firms employ mainly women operators. They make up the bulk of the workforce and some 98 per cent of them are between the ages 18 and 25. For the majority, it is their first job experience. They are fresh out of high school or commercial school.

The reason most of these young women take on the tedium of key punching really has nothing to do with career goals.

"I had no choice", said one. "That was the only job I could get at the time."

Data entry firms in Jamaica are on the increase. There are several operating in

Kingston and five in Montego Bay. Of those in the second city, two, owned by foreign investors, are located in the Montego Bay Free Zone. The three others are locally owned and carry out operations outside the Free Zone area.

The locally owned firms are mainly run by black, Jamaican, male professionals with technical training, who sometimes do work as data entry consultants for the local market.

There are two main types of data entry firms operating in Jamaica. There is the low value type (often described as 'sweat shop operations') and there is the high value operation which extends beyond mere key punching.

At the low value firms, operators are mainly required to handle data such as store coupons, mailing lists and sweepstakes from North American companies.

Data Bay in Montego Bay handles a large number of low value data. This firm employs about 120 operators working on three shifts each day. All of them are women. Of the six men at Data Bay, four are shareholders, one is a programmer and the other a trainer.

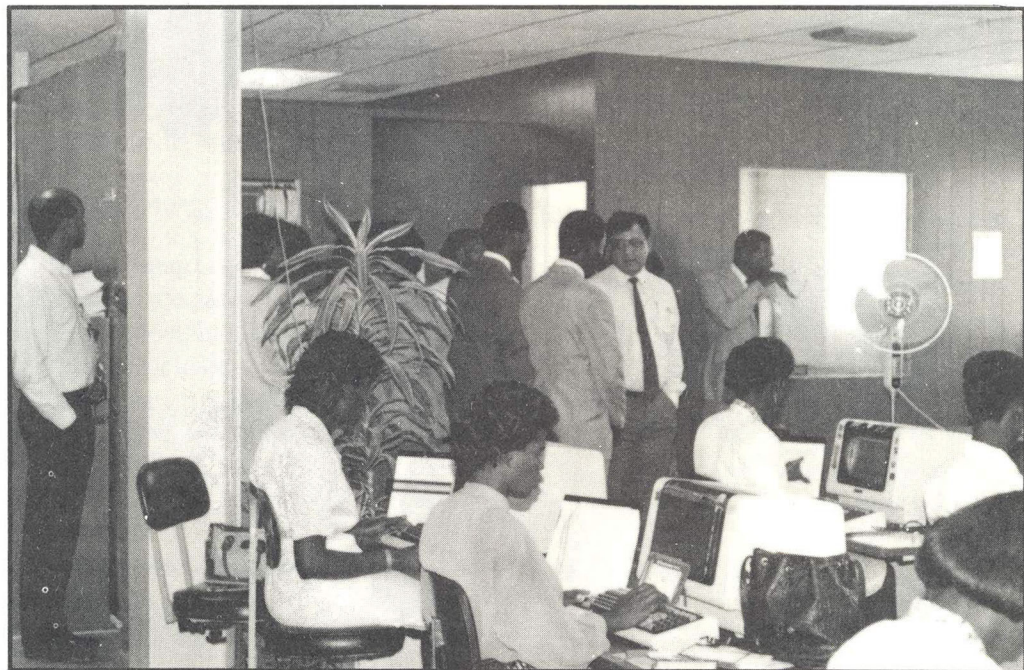
Why this predominance of women? Owners tend to trot out the usual arguments. "Women are better at this kind of job. They are more dexterous, more disciplined, more caring about the quality of work and more agile", says Mike Hicks, Managing Director of Data Bay.

Other owners of data entry firms feel that women are preferred to men in this industry because they are more reliable. Although men are sometimes seen as "better" workers, they tend to move up or out of the industry very quickly.

Those who attribute the tendency towards young women workers as being based on the low salaries, the monotony of the job and the general conditions of work, are probably far nearer the truth.

SALARIES AND BENEFITS

There is a wide discrepancy in salaries and benefits among the firms operating in Jamaica. While the foreign owned firms average about \$3.00 an hour for operators and between \$250.00 and \$350.00 per week for supervisors, there are a number of benefits included in the package. Uniforms, lunch, transportation, Group Healthy Insurance and a non-contributory



The men talk and the women work



Eyes down at Advanced Automation, a foreign owned company operating out of the Montego Bay Free Zone.

pension scheme are offered by Advanced Automation which was one of the first firms to gain Free Zone status.

The locally owned firms in both Montego Bay and Kingston do not offer benefits beyond incentives linked to productivity; that is, an operator may earn extra money if she exceeds her quota for the day. A fairly typical example is DPK Limited in Kingston, the only firm in the industry with a women as General Manager. At DPK the salary for an operator ranges from \$650 to \$950 per month depending on productivity.

Some local managers and owners, like David Trotman, Managing Director of D & H International in Kingston, say they "are looking into the possibility of providing uniforms, a health scheme and a pension scheme." Others, however, don't make any such claim. Hicks is quite firm about the immediate situation at Data Bay, declaring, "No work no pay!"

The bottom line is that the amount earned is totally dependent upon the operator. Women like Karen who are "very fast and accurate" may earn up to \$350 at the end of the week. But to earn this amount, Karen was quick to point out, "It's very hard work. I wouldn't encourage any young girl to come into data entry if they have a choice."

THE HEALTH FACTOR

"I'm too young to be a hunchback. I'm

never really comfortable in the neck and back areas. The numbness I feel in my arms sometimes makes it even hard to pick up a glass of water." (Word processor, California, USA).

One of the most worrying aspects of the industry as it is set up in Jamaica, is the apparent lack of knowledge about health risks for those sitting for long hours in front of a computer.

While data entry firms in the UK, Canada and the US, are being forced into an awareness of these risks by women's organisations, unions and the female workers themselves, the industry in Jamaica still has to catch up. No special attention is paid to the type of seating used, the frequency with which operators are able to get up and walk about, lighting or anything else. Yet worldwide it is now beginning to be recognised that data entry operators do suffer physical and mental trauma as a result of the work they do (see page 22).

Actual office conditions also varied, but for the most part, owners at least recognise that their machinery needs to be operated in air conditioning. That, at least, is a benefit for the workers.

TRAINING

Operating on a shift system - 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and 12:00 noon to 8:00 p.m. - most of the women employed to DPK, a Kingston-based firm, are high school

graduates with or without passes in CXC or G.C.E. examinations. Some firms require a minimum of two passes at G.C.E. or CXC "O" levels including English Language. Still others require nothing more than basic typing skills.

The attitude to training by the firms seems almost begrudging. Mike Hicks complains that "a substantial amount of funds are put into training recruits before they attain a functional level." David Trotman of D & H International feels that the money put into training recruits is a risk. "There is always the possibility that an applicant will leave the firm immediately on being trained, and it costs us some \$2,000.00 to train each recruit," he said.

The length of time for training also varies. At Data Bay, for example, the training period is between six and nine months and occasionally takes up to a year!

Asked why the seemingly simple matter of learning a computer keyboard would require nine months of training, Hicks gave the following response. "Some of these women who come to us saying they can type at 45 words per minute can only do 10 words per minute. Some have no typing skill and almost all of them have no knowledge of computers." Over these months, Data Bay pays a training allowance of \$100.00 per week. At the foreign-owned Advanced Automation, the training period extends between three and six months.

Compare this with DPK and D & H International, where the upper limit on training is three months and the actual length of time that a recruit spends in training is entirely dependent on her own aptitude.

POOR PROMOTION PROSPECTS

In both foreign and locally owned firms the prospects for "moving up" from the lowest level of key punch operator to the administrative or management level are almost non-existent.

This fact impacts on the attitude of many of the workers.

"I would leave tomorrow morning if I could find something else," one girl exclaimed decidedly. Her sentiment was echoed by several of the young women we spoke to. They are quietly doing private studies with the hope of moving out of a system which they feel lacks scope for promotion.

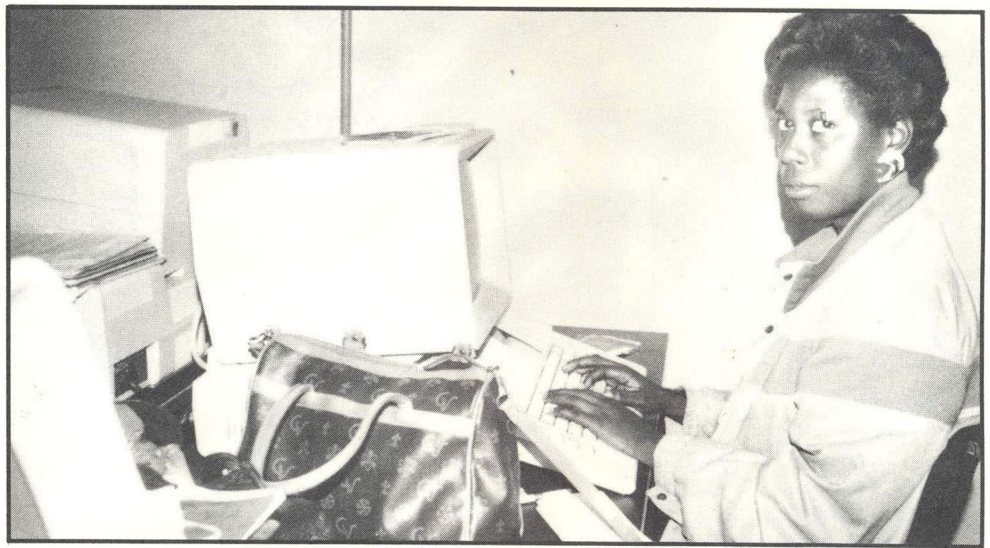
Others, like Karen accept lack of upward mobility as part of the job. "Once you are a good key punch operator, as I am, it doesn't make sense for you to move up because when you are a supervisor, you are not actually involved in key punching. And, that is what I do well."

Other workers are more cynical. They recognised that it was not in the interest of the company to promote good key punchers. Hicks, who is Karen's boss, says she is one of his fastest and most accurate operators. "When she gets on that machine, she literally flies." His enthusiasm made it clear that he would forever wish Karen to stay in her current position.

In any case, there are few supervisory positions into which a Karen could move, whatever her potential may be. "There is not much scope for promotion in the industry," confirmed Trottman of D & H.

At Advanced Automation there is only one position of programmer at the Middle Management level. As Claudia Fletcher-Smith, Montego Bay Free Zone General Manager points out, "Unless that programmer dies or leaves, there is no chance of any other girl realizing her dreams - at least not at that particular firm."

Again firms differ on recruitment, some taking a more sensitive approach towards the question of promotion. At Data Bay all the supervisors were recruited in that ca-



Getting Her Priorities 'Right'

At 23, Donna Williams is one of the hundreds of young women in Jamaica now making a living in the Data Entry field. A graduate of Excelsior High School, Donna was no novice to computers when she joined DPK as a data entry operator three years ago. Prior to joining the DPK workforce, she had done a course in computing at Fitz Henley's Commercial College.

From then Donna made up her mind that she wanted to pursue a career in computing and specifically to become a Systems Analyst. At DPK she quickly attained the level of Senior Operator and sometimes acts as a Supervisor. Unlike a number of other girls employed to DPK, Donna finds her job interesting. For her there's enough variety to provide a welcome break from the monotony of mere key punching. The variety is provided by alternating between payroll preparation, preparing coupons and mailing lists.

However, there is presently no scope for her to move further up in the system which offers so little opportunity for women at the management level.

But that's OK for Donna at this time. "I know I will have to go back to school if I want to get further promotion, but right now I just want to dedicate my time to my religious duties." An ardent Jehovah's Witness, she is clear that any job she does has to allow time for her religion.

Donna sometimes works on the 8 a.m. to the 4 p.m. shift which leaves her enough time to attend to her religious duties after work and to attend Kingdom meetings. When she is on the noon to 8 p.m. shift she goes home to house visiting before she begins work.

"I don't want anyone to get the idea that my secular job is not important to me", said Donna, "but it is just that right now I want to be the best pioneer that I can."

capacity. This means there has been no opportunity for promotion from the lower level in the company's three years of operation. At DPK, though, as the firm has expanded some women have been given the opportunity to move up from the position of data entry operator to supervisor.

UNIONISATION: A VEXED QUESTION

There is little doubt that a number of women in these firms are quite disgruntled with the general conditions of work and the low salaries which are paid. They would

welcome union representation. However, their bosses would not.

Mike Hicks has a non-compromising view on the subject. "I tell you this, if the union should come in today, by tomorrow many, or all, of these firms would close down. Unionisation and production just do not mix," was his claim.

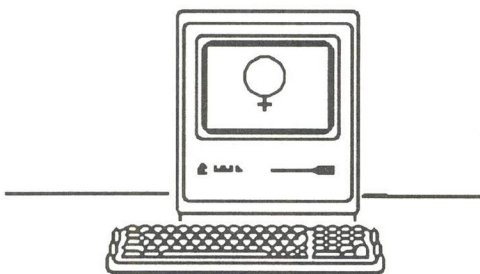
EXPANSION?

Some observers of the data entry industry are predicting a significant expansion of the industry within the next five years, "if the right environment is provided." By that they mean the extent to which local firms are "freed-up of bureaucratic nonsense, and given incentives similar to those the foreign firms in the Free Zone get." (Translated that means tax and other such concessions). Some of these observers also think more and more women will become involved at the management level as this expansion takes place. "Women are going to be in the forefront," they say.

Carol Watson of DPK (see box) would be a good example of the career potential for women in the industry. But her experience is hardly typical in this moment. Obviously, if more firms come on stream, opportunities will open for some of the Dianas and the Karens, who are even now honing their skills in hope for the future.

At this moment however, our young women workers are providing the cheap labour that ensures their counterparts in the industrialised countries will continue to be laid off, as those in need of data entry services seek cheaper pastures to get it done.

It's very likely though, as time goes on and consciousness grows, that women in the data entry industry will start to organise and make demands for health insurance, improved working conditions, unionisation, and increased pay. Just like the Free Zone garment workers have been doing.



A Woman in a Man's World



She sits at her desk in her uptown office wearing a shy smile. She looks so young, and indeed she's only 28, not much older than the 60 other workers who make up the organisation.

Carol Watson looks like an ordinary woman out there with the rest of us, but she's not. Carol is currently the only woman who heads a data entry firm in Jamaica.

And how did she find her way into this predominantly male world of data entry management?

A Natural Sciences graduate of the University of the West Indies, who specialised in Chemistry, Carol says, "When I graduated I wanted to do something in computing because I thought it would make me more marketable." Her bet paid off when she got the opportunity of building DPK, four years ago.

When she took over as General Manager, DPK was just a small firm struggling to make its mark on the Data Entry scene with 25 workers. Carol's leadership and determination has since built it into one of the largest data entry firms in the island.

"But it has been hard work," she says, settling back into her chair with a little smile, as if reminiscing on those early days. "There were times when I worked 24 hours straight. There were other times when I worked seven days a week!"

But in those early days she was a single woman with no family responsibilities.

Times have changed for Carol. She's now married with a one-year-old daughter and there's more pressure.

"I have to do a lot of juggling and scheduling. In a job as demanding as this one you can't really prioritise. You can't say that my family comes first at all times or my job must take priority. I find that I have to deal with situations as they confront me. There have been times when I have had to pack up my daughter and take her along to work with me."

As a "woman in a man's world" Carol has risen to the challenge and is doing well.

But how does she feel in this unique position? Does she have any problems relating to the men who are heads of other firms in the industry?

Carol finds that there is not much interaction among the managers of the various firms. Most of her clients are men, however, "but I have never had any of them say to me you can't do this because you are a woman, or anything like that."

She sees a lot of potential for growth in the industry. "The industry is fairly new and there is no doubt that there is scope for growth, but people in the industry will have to begin to see it as a career."

Carol feels strongly that Data Entry should be incorporated into the curriculum of high schools. And, she has a word for women who are aspiring to the top of Data Entry firms. "It is not an easy job. You have to work some very strange hours. It is really difficult, especially if you have a family."

A Case of Com

Office computers, also known as video display terminals (VDTs) have revolutionised office work. But at the same time workers operating the machines have reported alarming job-related health problems.

VDT Syndrome is the term now being used to describe the range of health problems affecting VDT users, from eye fatigue requiring changes in eyeglass prescriptions, to wrist inflammations requiring surgery, to increased stress. Typical VDT job injuries include the following:

1.

REPETITIVE STRAIN INJURIES

These are injuries resulting from continuous repetition of the same motor activity which in turn leads to a strain on overused muscles and tendons. The most common such injury is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS) or inflammation of tendon sheaths passing through the wrist, and damage to the median nerve. Surgery is often prescribed, but does not always cure this ailment. In Some cases victims cannot perform such simple tasks as turning a door knob, shampooing hair or writing a letter.

Poor tables and keyboards, combined with repetitive, high speed work are said to be the cause of the problem.

2.

VISION DISORDERS AND EYE STRAIN

Most VDT operators questioned for surveys in the United States have some sort of eye strain. Working at a computer is very vision demanding. Eye strain can be painful and disabling, as well as expensive, at times involving vision impairments and the

need for glasses where there was no need prior to using a computer.

3.

MUSCULOSKELETAL STRAIN

Back injuries are now seen as the primary cause for lost work time among women workers in the United States. A recent article in the American Bar Association's **Mental and Physical Disability Law Reporter**, confirmed the link between musculoskeletal strain and long periods of sitting at computers.

"The nature of VDT work limits motion. Numerous studies have been conducted on the relationship between these limitations and the symptoms of back, neck and shoulder pain; the consensus (is) that a direct relationship exists between the absence of motion and postural stress."

Surveyed workers from a range of VDT occupations in the US, report neck and back strain, diagnosed as work related, which has disabled them from returning to work, or which required on-going medical treatment.

4.

STRESS AND STRESS-RELATED DISEASES

Stress problems are most prevalent among workers whose jobs involve excessive computer monitoring. Take the example of a California airline reservations clerk who described her job as "discouraging and dehumanising". The computer monitored the number of seconds she spent on each call, the seconds between each call, and the time she spent on lunch and bathroom

breaks. After four years she suffered a nervous breakdown diagnosed by her psychiatrist as work related.

It is generally believed amongst psychiatrists who have treated computer monitoring-related cases, that the tendency amongst managements to use them in a negative way (i.e. punishing workers for not keeping up with quotas, or raising minimum quota levels), leads to excessive emotional upset and stress.

VDT-related health problems are often overlooked in the beginning phases or not recognised as job related because:

- they develop gradually;
- they often involve intense pain, but are not symptoms which are measurable, and
- they can often be attributed to a variety of different factors.

The tendency to ignore VDT illnesses is dangerous because workers will often continue to work despite pain. "I believed the pain to be an inevitable part of the job, and I was unaware of the risk of long-term injury," reported an American secretary, who worked long hours at the computer despite extreme soreness in her fingers. She acquired CTS and eventually lost the ability to use her fingers.

Similarly, a data entry operator who when her left hand became so stiff she could not use it, continued to work with her right hand only. Eventually, she went to her doctor to be told that she would need surgery on her left hand, and that if she continued to use her right hand on the computer, she would acquire the same problem of CTS in that hand within two years.



puter Cramps

CURING THE CRAMPS

There are some fairly simple measures which can be taken by managements to reduce health risks to workers who use computers for long periods, including:

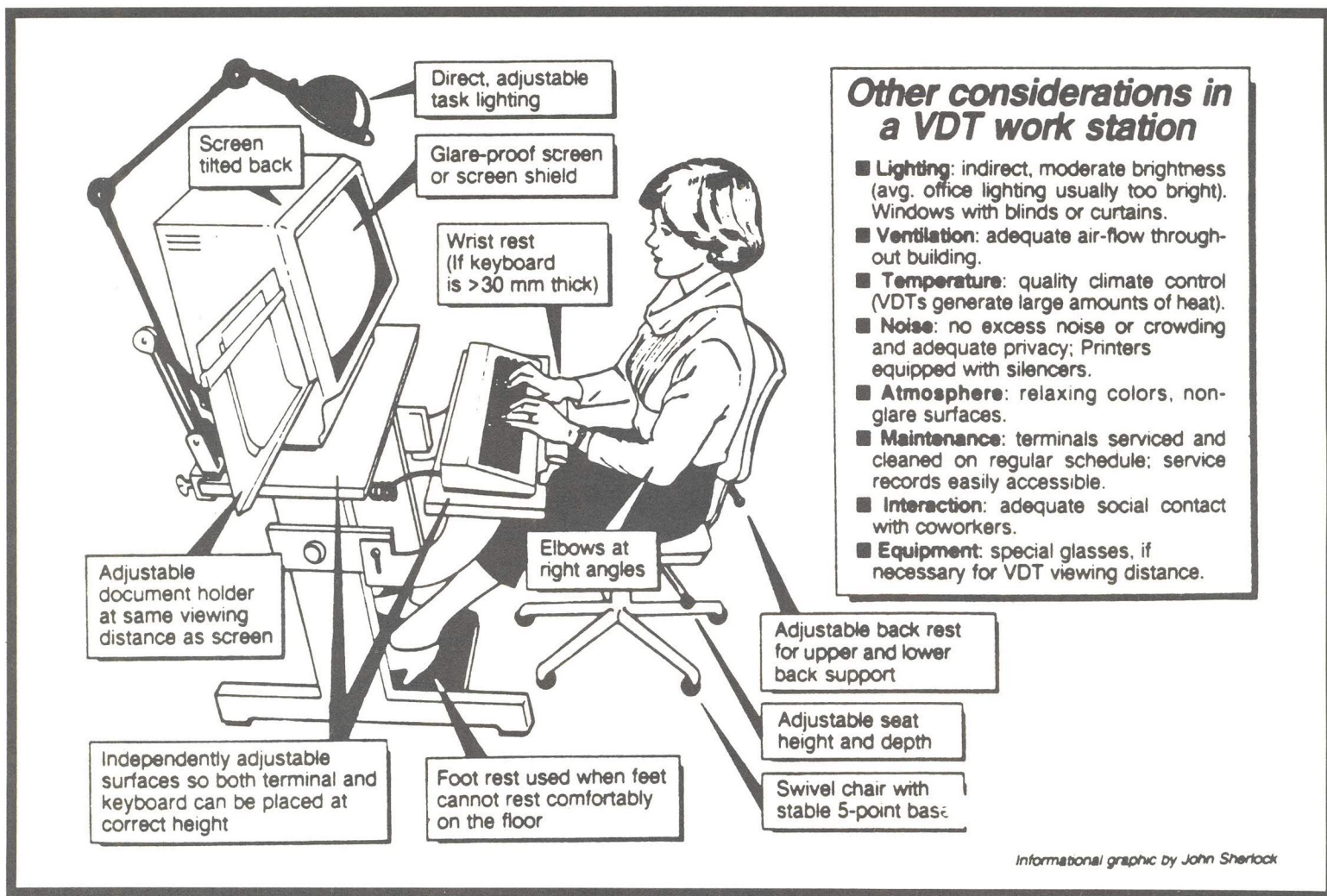
- well designed furniture and lighting;
- regular rest breaks (apart from lunch and tea breaks);
- more work variety.

The diagram below illustrates the type of flexible work station required by data entry workers in

order to cut down on health risks.

Taking these measures will guarantee a healthier and happier workforce, which in turn guarantees increased productivity.

(Source: *VDT Syndrome, the Physical and Mental Torture* published by the Campaign for VDT Safety)



Who's Afraid to be Liberated?

by Joan Ross-Frankson

I always find it weird (and a little pathetic) when a woman says she does not believe in women's liberation. What could she possibly mean? Is it that she feels women are already enjoying equal status in this world of male power, so talk of their 'liberation' is just so much hot and meaningless air? Surely not!

Even if I couldn't read about the fact that women of the world are, in the main, 'poor, powerless and pregnant', (the words of the latest United Nations survey on the status of women, not mine), then I certainly have eyes to see, ears to hear and a heart to feel all that is going on around me.

We are certainly poor. Although we are half the world's population and carry out almost two-thirds of the world's working hours, we only get one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one-hundredth of the world's property (U.N. 1980). We have the highest unemployment rate. In November 1988, 50.8% of Jamaican women between the ages of 15 and 25 years were unemployed in comparison with 18.9% of young men in the same age group. Over 25 years of age we are even worse off with a rate of 17.1% for women compared with 5.8% for men.

Without a doubt we are powerless. How else would you describe the fact that we don't even have control over our own bodies. A married woman wanting to 'tie-off' after having the number of children she wishes, cannot do so without her husband's permission. For an unmarried woman without children - try your best! Who will accommodate her when she has not yet fulfilled that which she was born to! And sin of

sins that she wants sex but not children!

There's legislation governing whether or not we can terminate pregnancies. And, when we Jamaican women marry foreigners, there's absurd legislation which prevents the children of the union from getting automatic Jamaican status. There's even legislation which effectively prevents us from bringing our husbands before the courts if they rape us.

Want more? Think about our low wages. The system still believes men are the main breadwinners so insists on using us as cheap labour. As though our work is a hobby or for 'pin money'! Think about the way we have been forced off the streets by men who rape us whether we are wearing mini-skirt and see through blouse or covered in sack-cloth and ashes; think about our double day of work-work, voluntary work and domestic work, while so many of

There's so much available documentation in regard to the skewed relations between men and women. Personally I was never one of those who thought the *Star* newspaper should give up reporting the facts of divorce cases. Yes, give up the sensationalism and the dragging of people's names through the dirt. But frankly, many of us are strengthened when we see that it is possible to break out of the bondage of lovelessness and brutality which characterises so many of our marriages. Many of us are however thoroughly fed-up with media images of women as clear-skinned, tall-haired, femme fatales, in swimwear cut to arm-pit level or evening dress cut to the navel, serving up some delicacy or another to some laid-back, black man. Not much to strengthen us there, I would say.

So perhaps these women who say they don't believe in women's liberation are so liberated themselves, they have failed to see the plight of the rest of us? No that can't be right either because it's a contradiction.

If they were truly liberated, they could hardly fail to see the problems of the sisters around them. That would surely be like a black person in South Africa thinking themselves liberated based on their own particular situation. Talk about sticking your head in the sand!

Well, I'll tell you what my conclusion is right here and now. Those women who say they don't believe in women's

liberation have accepted their role as designated by the male system - to be a man's plaything; to keep their place and *never* rock the boat.

I'm sorry they don't feel able to join the rest of us in efforts to liberate ourselves. And I truly pity them in their blindness. But in all honesty, they are themselves desperately in need of liberation! ♀



our men find all the time in the world to prop up rum bar, keep mistress, play poker, bet on the horses or just relax and read a good book.

No, it simply cannot be that women in this day and age who say they don't believe in women's liberation are dumb enough to honestly think that women don't need to be liberated! Where are they living? On the moon!

How Are We Growing Our Children in This Stressful Society?

“Once I was taken to task by a woman on a talk show I was moderating, because of a comment I made that woman is the primary nurturer. I am making that statement again without apology. It is impossible for women to deal with family and child rearing in a positive way unless they are prepared to acknowledge their natural responsibility, especially in the context of society as it is designed today.

More women are going out and achieving career goals, but at the same time there is the expectation of the society that we must also have a man and children. Hence the Superwoman syndrome in which we are expected to walk a tightrope to manage all these responsibilities. It is an impossibly stressful task, which tends to detract from harmonious family relations. As a result family life as the basis for developing values and culture in the society is breaking down.

I recognise the increased stresses on young people from our inhospitable and unfair environment, but I also want my children to develop in the wholesome way required by human beings. That is why I have chosen to weight my focus on my nurturing responsibility. It is a difficult choice to make because I also yearn to achieve more at a different level.”



Elaine Wint-Leslie, Communications Specialist



“Even if a woman wants to have several children for different men, she shouldn't do so for economic reasons. She should be motivated as an independent person and not have to rely on men. She should have children when she wants them, not to hold a man, or because a man wants a child, or because she's looking economic dependency. If she wants the child, she will also want to nurture it in the right and proper way, without the frustration of rejection. Once she is rejected she may take that rejection out on the child. In any case life is too hard right now for we women to open ourselves to more stress and strain.

I had four children for three different men. It was hard to grow them, but I have always had an independent way with me. So even if the man is gone, I was working so I could go along by myself. The children never got everything they wanted or even needed; the money could never stretch that far. But I loved them and grew them in a way that made them know themselves and respect me as a woman and a mother.”

Lillian Foster, “50-ish”
Actress, Sistren Theatre Collective



“To build a good relationship with your children you have to start talking to them from very early in life, even before they are able to understand you. Although we are living in a society where child rearing is becoming more and more difficult, I find that being open with my child makes a lot of difference. A child needs a lot of love. Parents must spend time with their children. Too many middle and upper class parents leave the training of their children to helpers. They do not find time to make sure that their children's clothes are clean for school or that they do their homework.

A mother does not stop being a mother, even when her children are grown and it is very important for us as mothers to remember this. I try to answer all my son's questions as frankly and as honestly as I can. If he asks me a question to do with a subject that I do not think he is ready for, I tell him so and as soon as I believe that he is ready for it, I will tell him. Truly, children live what they learn, and I believe it all begins at home.”

Sonia Brown, Age 37
Hairdresser

WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Angry Women Fight Back

During this summer's pro-abortion campaign in the United States, a friend signed a petition one morning while out shopping. By the time she got home there was a message on her answering phone about a march planned for the next day. Now that's high-tech networking! In India, it's become commonplace for women using public transport to gang up on men who 'rub-up' on them, and haul them off to the nearest police station. That's what you'd call positive 'gang-warfare'. In St Lucia earlier this year, women took to the streets in public protest against domestic violence. The march was stimulated by the murder of a woman by her common-law husband. He killed her after she had made a report of incest against him to the police. She had asked for police protection.

Women all over the world are finding ways to make their voices heard. We are organising creative activities in response to different forms of abuse and various issues that affect us in our own particular environments.

The response of one working-class women's group in Leeds, UK, towards the spread of pornography shops in the city was to meet fire with fire. Calling themselves Angry Women, members of the group literally waged war against pornography dealers and businesses in Leeds between 1974 and 1984. In that period, they set fire to 25 sex shops, causing over £500,000 worth of damage. They were often afraid, but they were never caught, outwitting all police attempts to find them.

The following interview is with an unnamed woman who was part of Angry Women. It was printed in 1988, in **Outwrite**, a British women's newspaper.

Q. Women don't often organise direct

action that involves criminal activity. Did the group have any special way of preparing for the attacks?

A. Since it was criminal activity, we used to sweat about it! We really needed to psyche ourselves out. We did this by discussing our feelings and responses, the fears that we We organised for the attacks mostly on a trial and error basis. We always made sure each person knew what their role was and that we all had alibis. Our principal concern was that there should be nobody on the premises to be attacked. We took precautions by watching the target buildings for up to three months to establish comings and goings including the level of police activity in the area.

For the attack itself, we wore very dark clothing, covered our faces and carried only the things we needed. We travelled in one or two cars, depending on the location, but always in pairs. Once we had finished, we went home for a hot bath to remove the smell (of petrol) and anything else incriminating.

Q. Why did the group make direct action a priority over campaigning?

A. Pornography is a form of hatred against women. It abuses women and children and it thrives on vile stereotypes. A sex shop opened in Leeds with its window plastered with posters showing an SS officer with a naked woman strung upside down, in front of him. Women tried to get rid of it legally by using the Indecent Displays Act. Nothing happened, so we attacked it.

Leeds Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) was strong at the time, and their campaigns provided a political context for us. We wished our activities to contribute to discussions, influence attitudes and put some pressure on the industry. We knew we could not smash the billion dollar pornography industry, but it was a way of choking off local supplies to those men who frequented sex shops daily and watched violent porn films every night, however temporary it was. Angry Women

made porn brokers understand that not all women are passive, and that there was strong opposition to them.

Q. Did your actions have any noticeable effect?

A. Only temporarily in most cases. Two shops closed down following our intervention, but most of them came back with upgraded security.

Q. What support did you get from the women's movement?

A. Although we did get support, there were objections too. The main one was that we were endangering the feminist community. Police surveillance, interrogation, raids, all took place. After one attack the police searched the home of some feminist academics. There were also objections to us breaking the law, and that we were guilty of censoring material. We found the objections that we were endangering life, the hardest to deal with.

Q. The pornography industry is booming today and violence against women has increased, but the movement has become dormant. Why do you feel this is so?

A. A lot of women were burnt out from working at fever pitch and there was nobody to replace them. A lot of middle-class women have gone off into careers. But it puzzles me that the younger women have not joined in. Some national networks still exist, like Women's Aid, but we don't see any campaigns to raise awareness about the issues. What is needed is a national network like WAVAW but with the involvement of a wider spectrum of women.

Q. Was your involvement in Angry Women politically satisfying?

A. No. It was satisfying to see results instantaneously in front of your eyes, and yes, we did make a dent in the pornography industry in Leeds. By the very nature of the activity it couldn't go much further unless there was a strong nationwide campaign on every front. Q



Working Together to End Violence

by Hilary Nicholson

Carlysle is a 36 year-old executive. He's been molesting his 13 year-old step-daughter Susanny for several months now. Susanny is shy plump and pretty.

"Yuh not a real man; real man don't do dem ting deh!" storms an indignant 14 year-old school boy at Carlisle. "Susanny, don't yuh believe yuh shoulda tell yu madda seh Carlisle a trouble yuh?" asks the primary school girl. She's genuinely concerned, and, young as he is, she offers Susanny advice and comfort.

The youngsters are two of some 150 students who have just watched a popular theatre piece and are challenging the actresses who played 'Carlisle' and 'Susanny' to account for their actions. The teenagers are full of questions. This Lunch-Hour Workshop on sexual violence provides an unusual forum for discussing child abuse and adult sexuality.

Women's Media Watch and Sistren ran the session at the Institute of Jamaica on November 16. It was just one of the many happenings in November (starting with the Women Inc Trade Fair) which highlighted ways in which communities can take steps to deal with the problem of violence against women.

Have you ridden on a SR1 bus and seen the **Real Men Don't Abuse Women** sticker? The conductor proudly showed me: he was displaying it prominently over the door.

These stickers - and others saying **No to Sexual Violence** were handed out to hundreds of eager hands at the popular theatre 'rally' on sexual violence at Half Way Tree Park on November 25 - the International Day Against Violence Against Women. Energetic Teens In Actions (from Seaview Gardens) and School of Drama students drew a huge crowd with their skits and songs which entertained us and challenged us to face up to the realities of sexual abuse as well as prejudiced attitudes which allow violence to occur. Groundwork Theatre's dynamic M.C.s involved the crowd in some heated discussions. The strong sentiments of the youths showed how much interest there is in the issue: they certainly didn't consider it "just a women's issue".

Maybe you missed the excitement at Half-Way-Tree Square but your radio or TV or newspaper surely brought to your attention the many different forms that sexual violence can take, and how we can each do something about it. TV and radio hosts on all kinds of programmes - **Roadbeat, Exposure, Taking-Care-of-Business, Hotline, Healthwatch, Morning Time** - talked with women who've survived violence, with counsellors who've helped them, and with men, to air views on the subject. JBC-TV broadcast films challenging stereotype views on rapes. Edi Fitzroy, Bello and Blacka, and Sistren, sent T.V. messages to the nation's viewers that we can **all** find our own ways of taking action to end the violence. Newspaper articles talked and argued about people's rights and wrongs, about the crimes, the laws and the social and legal reforms needed.

Twenty different women's organisations signed a **Call to Action** demanding such reforms, and the booklet **No to Sexual**

Violence was widely distributed to give each of us an idea of how to go about making these demands, and where to get assistance if we do need it. Womens Resource & Outreach Centre ran counselling sessions, and Sistren began a nationwide programme of workshops for schools on the issue. Already 400 students in seven schools in four parishes have participated in the workshop programme which will continue to June 1990.

During November information packages highlighting the facts on sexual violence were distributed by the Association of Women's Organisations (AWOJA) to public personalities and media personnel to sharpen their awareness and understanding of the issue. Persons interested in obtaining this information pack can contact AWOJA at 42 Trafalgar Road, Kingston 10.

Into December, activities are still going on to encourage women to take control of their lives and develop confidence in dealing with violence. On Dec. 6, a self-defence workshop for women led by Karate Instructor Errol Lyn was held, and a wide range of groups and organisations are planning panel discussions and talks around the issue.

How was all this activity and interest generated? Easy! Well, so it seems in retrospect! Certainly it was feasible and fun!

We joined forces under the AWOJA umbrella, brainstormed, and supported one another's ideas and events: "we" being an assortment of women and men from AWOJA affiliates and friends. Collectively we made more than a ripple this year. Next year let's aim for a tidal wave of action to bring an end to violence against women!

More On The Tour

The interest and enthusiasm generated by Sistren's Caribbean tour earlier this year has not ended with their return to Jamaica.

Organising committees in the 10 territories visited during the tour have been holding evaluations and the main funding agency, HIVOS, also plans an overall evaluation next year. Separate and apart from these evaluations, Sistren itself plans to hold a full regional evaluation in one of the territories in April, 1990.

Following is feedback from members of three organising committees in St Lucia, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago which were first printed in *CAFRA News** (Vol 3, No.3.)

ST LUCIA: "TREMENDOUSLY SUCCESSFUL"

by Kennedy "Boots" Samuel

Thanks, praises and 'nuff respect' have been flowing in St Lucia following Sistren's visit (May 15-22). It was a tremendously successful week of consciousness-raising around issues of women and development.

The talented, serious and very cultural sisters of Sistren facilitated or participated in workshops, performances, social encounters and community link-up activities that affected a wide cross section of St Lucian women, community workers, cultural activists and the general public.

The activities climaxed with a grassroots link up in the culturally rich northern community of Babonneau. There Sistren was hosted for the day by the Babonneau Mothers and Fathers League. Hundreds of parents of this large community turned up to share experiences and cultural forms with the Jamaican sisters. It was a day for deep reflection, warmth, love and fun, that typified the spirit of the entire week of activities. Some very crucial achievements of the

tour for development work in St Lucia include:

Networking between a wide cross section of previously isolated grassroots organisations, community groups and other social organisations interested in women and development;

An injection of enthusiasm among those involved with women's issues. Note that just 3-months later, the first women's public march in St Lucia was held to protest against domestic violence;

The establishment of firm bonds between women and cultural workers in St Lucia and Sistren of Jamaica;

An increased interest in Popular theatre forms.

The St Lucian 'leg' of the tour may well have been the 'soul' of the entire tour.

SURINAME: PROVIDING NEW SKILLS

by Helen Kerk

It was a rainy Tuesday when Sistren Theatre Collective arrived in Suriname, the last country the group visited during its Caribbean Tour.

The grand programme we had scheduled had to undergo changes due to the plane crash of June 7, in which 177 of the 186 passengers died, including several outstanding football players attached to clubs in Holland and a group of musicians. A month of national mourning followed.

The intention had been that the government would host Sistren. When this had to be cancelled due to the disaster, a small committee was formed to take over the organisation since a lot of women's groups and organisations so badly wanted Sistren to come to Suriname.

During the 7-days of Sistren's visit, they presented two workshops for women's groups (one on group building entitled 'Getting Together and Staying Together' and one on Teenage Parenting), one workshop for theatre groups and two performances of *Buss Out!*

In terms of the women's groups, participation was very good. Sistren provided new skills for handling groups, working together and recognising leadership ability. The workshop on Teenage Parenting was badly needed since this problem has seriously increased in our country. The audiences at *Buss Out!* were fully satisfied with the production and recognised many similar aspects of life in Suriname.

In the programme there was also time for Sistren members to do their own thing on visits to our Central Market, a rehearsal of our national ballet company, an exhibition of creole head-ties and the national funeral



Sistren performs Buss Out! in Guyana.

of the unidentified victims of the plane-crash.

Sistren was really excited by a trip to a village of Amerindians and a village of Bushnegroes. A lot of the expressions, dances and plays in these indigenous cultures have similarities with Jamaican culture.

Sistren enjoyed their visit to Suriname very much, particularly their experiences with the village people and the food and hospitality of the people of Suriname.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO: REVEALING AVENUES OF OPPORTUNITY by Rawle Gibbons

A visit such as Sistren's affords us the opportunity not only to see the visitors on show but to assess our own comparative situation. In this regard several questions arise. Can we support such a visit? How does our local fare compare with the foreign work? What/how can we gain from this visit?

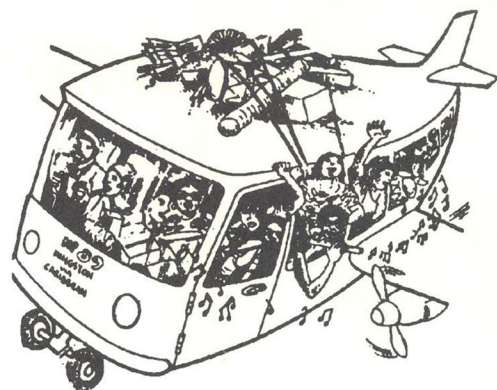
The first question is to do with planning, mustering support and releasing information to the public. Some 1,200 people saw the Sistren production, **Buss Out!** Opening the National Drama Festival on June 1, the Jamaican guests easily gave the most exciting performance. The fact that (with one exception) the group played to capacity audiences meant for us that, despite the fall-off at the Festival level, the audience for good theatre was increasing in the country.

The logistics of moving the group between workshop /rehearsal/performance and social activities settled down after the first couple of days and worked relatively smoothly. On the technical side, the Creative Arts Centre, UWI, provided crew and technical support for the performances. This turned out to be something of an achievement for the Centre, which called upon its own Graduate Theatre Company, My People Inc (San Fernando) and a couple of talented, dedicated individuals.

As for the production **Buss Out!**, there is no doubt in my mind of its theatrical success. The production was imaginatively executed with dynamic performances, attractive sets and compulsive music. The enjoyment of audiences was qualified only by the language distance that became a difficulty in Trinidad but less so in Tobago where the creole 'favours' the Jamaican.

The play itself, I believe needs some attention. The stereotyping of unsympathetic characters (males/upper class) remains a problem in Sistren's work as was evident in the portrayal of the 'fronted' middle-class journalist. Warrior, the play's protagonist, also suffers from stereotyping and, though played with great conviction and power, needed more shading and movement of personality. The production required more work on its dramatising and less on its theatrics.

It is the process behind the play that would have been of interest to local dramatists. Sistren, having created eight productions, is now quite adept at the process of play-making, which some of our groups are just



beginning to explore. But the opportunity to share the Sistren methodology was lost due to lack of enthusiasm/action on the part of the National Drama Association, which seemed indifferent to publicising a workshop offered by the group for this purpose. The group's workshops with women and the exchange workshop on Carnival also made obvious the local absence of theatre as an instrument of community development - whether communities of women, abused children, drug addicts.

It is through the effort of making such an encounter possible that avenues of opportunity became apparent. The Sistren visit certainly stimulated us to see some of these. The notion of organising one's talents for the development of self, community and one's economic well-being is a lesson that we can well put to use. From their various activities, this lesson remains Sistren's final message. ♀

(*Organ of the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action)

FROM OUR MAILBAG

Dear Sistren,

I am writing to request copies of **Sistren** in return for copies of our newsletter, **Drops of Sweat**. I am also in the process of developing ideas for the next issue of **Drops of Sweat** and intend to feature the experiences of Caribbean women workers in the Free Trade Zones. Can **Sistren** help us to get more information for the features? I would very much like to ensure that **Sistren** is seen as a mobilising force in this issue.

In Sisterhood,
Kumudhini Rosa,
West Germany.



Dear Sistren,

I recently visited Jamaica for the third time. This time more than ever before, I was really astounded by the way men treat women in Jamaica. It made me really upset and even mad, when comments were directed at me; it was difficult to remain silent. Indeed there's a long way to go before we achieve equality in Canada too, it's just that the inequalities are more hidden here.

Anyway, I was thrilled to hear about your collective and would appreciate getting more information about your group and how I can receive your newsletter.

Sincerely,
Bridget Goldsmith
Toronto, Canada.

Senator Billie Miller and the Women's Dimension



Senator Billie Miller and Madonna Sampson bucked up in Barbados last month at a Caribbean Media Conference on Population and Development.

Miller is a strong, black woman who was Minister of Health in the former government of Barbados, and who remains as outspoken and popular as ever. Sampson is a strong, black woman from Trinidad and Tobago; an outspoken working journalist who is the Broadcasting Officer at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Miller gave her views about women in the development process, the impact of structural adjustment on Caribbean economies and more, when she was interviewed by Sampson. Following are edited extracts.

MS. What has been Barbados' experience with getting women's concerns into the process of development?

BM. Barbados is used as a model everywhere in the world for good population practices and good family planning programmes, particularly in the way we have integrated population concerns into the entire development process. Population concerns inform the policies of the Ministry of Planning and Development in relation to health, education, housing, tourism,

labour. In Barbados we have long past the situation where population was seen as an exclusively family planning matter and shoved in the background at the Ministry of Health. But we still have a lot of room for more integration of women into the mainstream of work and knowledge that is relevant to the 1990s, and into the year 2000.

In developed countries women are coming more and more into the traditional professions. Almost all the doctors and engineers in Russia are women, and more of this is happening now in the Third World. Men are moving to the more sophisticated professions, what we call the new technology. We still have a lot of rapid growth ahead of us because we must as women be able to make our contribution at the technological level as well.

MS. How does Barbados compare with the rest of the Caribbean in relation to the integration of women?

BM. In Barbados we still have not ever had a woman Permanent Secretary in any of the ministries of government. In the other islands of the Caribbean we have women in several ministries as Permanent Secretaries. We have had women as a Speakers of the House, as Clerks of Parliament in other areas of the Caribbean that are viewed as less developed but we've not had them here

in Barbados. So in some respects, we in Barbados are behind the times.

MS. How do you see policy-makers balancing concerns between social and economic development in the face of external demands for structural adjustment?

BM. Structural adjustment is having a devastating effect on the social sectors in the Caribbean; cut-backs in health and education, housing, roads. The productive sectors are saying that in order to merely keep running on the same spot we must have more, and the only other place it can come from is the social sectors. But we must keep a balance. If not, the social sectors will regress further. We will again have diseases we believed were long conquered; which we thought were going to be past tense forever. And that would have a debilitating effect on the workforce. A cutback in education is going to have a negative impact on the workforce.

What we have is a situation where policies and programmes designed for developed countries are being lifted wholesale and expected to fit neatly into a developing country context. It can't be so. They have to tailor it to suit us.

Mrs. Thatcher can afford to pay for her monetary policies in Britain. She can afford to pay in unemployment. We can't. We need to invest in the social services to prevent regression, because the price to pull them back to today's level is going to be three, four times as much. We've seen it in Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad. It's taking two, three years to throw the economy out of kilter, and it's going to take 20, 25 years to repair it.

MS. Would you agree it's time for a more novel and cooperative effort from politicians, their advisors, and economists, as well as the international funding agencies?

BM. We need more women in all of these groupings. We need the women's dimension. What women bring to the development process is another perspective; a women's perspective. Without it, there's no balance. When we do have women playing a larger, more meaningful role in the development process, it's not as if by magic, everything is going to balance. But I think it would be better than where we are now. ♀

CURL UP WITH A GOOD BOOK FOR 1990

by Leone Ross

BLAZE A FIRE

by *Nesha Z. Haniff*

Blaze A Fire walks and talks with 28 Caribbean women through the cane-fields, through strikes, studies, economic pressures, emotional trauma, and triumph. Haniff unites them as "women of integrity, intelligence and spirit" and spins for us, a rich fabric of humanity on these pages.

There is determination: "Me don't have money, but me goin take de chance. Me goin sell me frock." There is warmth: "Every morning I used to ... peep into his cup. He used to leave a little coffee for me. ... The coffee that grandpa left for me ... was his love...." And there is prejudice: "I did my three years (law) training ... I applied to the registrar (to prepare for the exam) ... He turned me down because I was a woman".

Haniff also does good service to the 'invisible' heroines: the working class activists and professional women that are so often ignored, and yet are so vital to the whole structure and flavour of our region. She gives us the cane cutter, the nurse, the women who sweep the church, the women who raise ten children and school them, along with the authors, the actresses, and the stateswomen. This dimension gives the book credibility and realism, and makes it a true source of inspiration.

TIMARIE

by *Valerie Belgrave*

If your heart and soul yearn for a romance you can relate to; if you are a little tired of reading about English rose petals and Scottish moors on wintry nights, try Valerie Belgrave's **Tia Marie**. Not only is the author West Indian, but the book is set in Trinidad and Tobago.

The sense of historical and physical atmos-

phere, the atrocities and tortures of slavery times, the racism, the backwardness, are all there, faithfully documented. But **Ti Marie** makes the point in a relaxed fashion. It doesn't shove it all down your throat. The realistic descriptions of torture, and the manipulation of the Caribbean by European powers adds a new dimension to the merely romantic. And, praise God for a warm, **correct** rendition of French patois and its soft sing-song tones.

If you are a romance novel freak, you won't be disappointed by **Ti Marie**. All of the juicy elements are there: the hauntingly beautiful, velvet-like women (shriek!); the restless, reckless, young English nobleman; their passion (consummated on convenient grassy knolls), and of course their battle against the prejudices of his family, before the triumph into wedded bliss.

HEALING HEART

by *Gloria T. Hull*

The works in **Healing Heart** ring true and intimate. Hull places a part of her own heart in the poems and asks us to contribute pieces of ours as we read. She does not preach; she simply writes of a woman's life. The very language is of the people: from the music of the blues and the honky-tonk rhythms of Black America, to bits and pieces of our own Jamaican tones.

Hull's characterisation and rendition of humanity is warm and excitingly, sensually, rich. The poems explore feelings, from deeply intimate reflections on men, ("While I kept the faith/he went through changes/and finally/ Became this sadness in my throat") to memories of family and friends. She tells us of the frustrations of loving deeply, the sacrifices and pride of motherhood; she attacks racism, poverty, and hypocrisy.

A bonus for the Jamaican readers among us: Hull dedicates one of the five sections of the book to a **Jamaica Journal** where she celebrates, criticises and comments on the land with total authenticity: "What I've

learned in Jamaica/is how much you can live without/How little water you need to bathe/How leaders remain silent while the people shout".

In this her first publication of creative writing, Ms Hull proves her worth as a 'literary' sister who strings her words together to make medicine. Taste a spoonful. It makes you think, redefine; it encourages you towards a higher consciousness, in the healing knowledge that is not you one feeling these things.

BEFORE THEY CAN SPEAK OF FLOWERS

by *Elean Thomas*

The message in Thomas' second collection of 'word rhythms', is summed up in its title. The experiences of those who labour - issues of gender, class and race - must be confronted, in order for all of us to be able to "speak with each other/of daffodils/delicate lilies/rare orchids...." It is essentially a call to action, one which echoes throughout the book in various forms.

Race must be examined not only in terms of the fighting people in South Africa, but from the twisted point of view of the middle-class woman who says plaintively "I married a Black man didn't I? Thank God/I can't be a racist...." Class is about the "(child) born uptown/the other born downtown", and the woman who slowly comes to realise it need not be the measure of friendship.

Examining gender issues, Thomas speaks of the female worker and the sameness of the struggles of women all over the world. She also pays tribute to national heroes and "sheroes"; to Grenada's revolution; to the man who reaches for a woman and is turned away because she is caught up in the struggle.

It is difficult to define poetry, to attach labels of 'right' or 'wrong', and in most of the works presented, Thomas is effective. But, sometimes the richness of feeling and the 'rightness' of theme, is lost in a rhetoric that is more effective at a political rally; some of the works lose in their eagerness to prescribe. And yet, it is in her more subtle works that the underlying political message is strongest: "I sang you love songs/even when I ceased/to be their concubine/but you couldn't stop/ being their stud." ♀

SISTA ANSA & GRANNY A CHAT BOUT... DI ECONOMY

FEB 15 1995

...AND YOU CAN BE ASSURED THAT WITH THE GROWTH IN THE ECONOMY...



MI CAAN FIND MONEY FI BUY FOOD AN PAY RENT, SO WHA KINE A GROWTH IM A CHAT BOUT?



MUSSI DI KINE A GROWTH WEH KILL YU, CHILE. AN DIS VA HOSPITAL WEH NAME JAMAICA NUH LOOK LIKE IT HAVE NUH SURGEON WEH CAN TEK IT OUT.



TINGS AH GET FROM BAD TO WORSE. YU KNOW SEH DUNG A JUBILEE 2 OUT OF EVERY 3 OOMAN A HAVE BABY WIDOUT NURSE OR DOCTOR?



AH WHA CAUSE DIS YAH SITUATION?



DEM BORROW BORROW WHOLE HEAP A MONEY AN TEK IT BUIL UP FREE ZONE AN DEM SUPP'M DEH!



WELL, FREE ZONE GOOD. PLENTY OOMAN GET WORK, AN CAN EARN LIKKLE MONEY



YES, ANSA, BUT WHA DI MONEY CAN DO? FOOD GONE UP TILL YU DONT KNOW WHA FI BUY. LAND-LORD LOCK UP DEM PLACE SEH IT NUH WORTHWHILE FI RENT. FI MEK IT INNA FREE ZONE YU HAFFI WORK OVERTIME ALL WEEKEN' YU DONT HAVE TIME FI EVEN REASON WID YU PICKNEY OR WORK TINGS THRU WID YU MAN. IF YU HAVE TIME YU BRUCK.



BUT GRANNY DAT'S WHA MI A ASK YU. HOW DEM BORROW FIGI WI JOB, DEN WHEN WI GET DI JOB, WI STILL CAN'T MANAGE?



MORE INTEREST

MORE INTEREST

MORE INTEREST

BECAUSE DEM TEK DI LOAN AN DEN DEM TAX WI FI PAY IT BACK. DI FREE ZONE OWNER DEM DONT PAY ONE CENT IN TAX. WHY YU TINK DEM PUT ON ALL DEM TAX PON HIGGLER AN DIS CONSUMPTION TAX WEH EVERYTING YU BUY YU HAFFI PAY TAX. DEM JUS A TEK MORE AN MORE LOAN, AN EVERYTIME DEMI PUT UP DI INTRES WI HAFFI PAY BACK MORE DAN WHA DI GOVERNMENT DID AGRREE TO. DEM A DIG OUT WI EYE FI PAY BACK SUPP'M WEH CAN'T PAY BACK, BECAUSE DI MORE WI PAY DI MORE WI OWE. WI SHOULD STOP TEK DI LOAN DEM!!



YU MAD?! HOW WI A GO LIVE WIDOUT MONEY?

TAX DI BIG COMPANY DEM, AN MEK DEM INVEST DI PROFIT RIGHT YA SO!

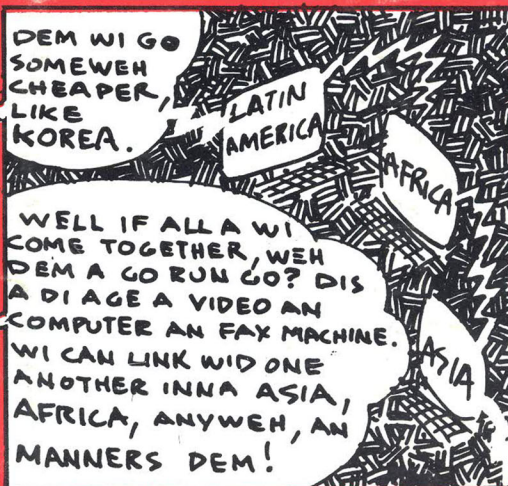


BUT DEM WI RUN WEH!

RUN WEH? LAST YEAR DEM MEK \$221 MILLION UP FROM \$175 MILLION IN 1987. YU TINK DEM A GO RUN WEH FROM MONEY?

DEM WI GO SOMEWEH CHEAPER, LIKE KOREA.

WELL IF ALLA WI COME TOGETHER, WEH DEM A GO RUN GO? DIS A DI AGE A VIDEO AN COMPUTER AN FAX MACHINE. WI CAN LINK WID ONE ANOTHER INNA ASIA, AFRICA, ANYWEH, AN MANNERS DEM!



TRUE. BUT DI GOVERNMENT NAH GO DO DAT.

YU AH GO WAIT PON DEM? IF WI DID WAIT PON DEM FI HELP WI FEED WI PICKNEY, WEH WI WOULD A DEH?

AH TRUE A NO WI TEK NO LOAN. A NO WI IT A BENEFIT. A NO WE FI PAY.

